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LANCES DOWN



LANCES DOWN

Between the Fires in Moscow


By

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In Collaboration with

HELEN WOODWARD

Authors of Way of the Lancer



Indianapolis

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

Publishers



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BY
RICHARD BOLES LAVSKI
AND
HELEN WOODWARD

FIRST EDITION

Printed in the United States of America

PRINTED AND BOUND BY
BRAUNWORTH & CO., INC.
BOOK MANUFACTURERS
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

TO THE MEMORY OF
THE TVER CAVALRY SCHOOL CADETS
DEAD OR ALIVE
R. B.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I ROLLING HOME	13
II MOSCOW	25
III GREETINGS	36
IV THE MOSCOW ART THEATER	48
V OUR STUDIO	61
VI THE LONG NIGHT BEGINS	72
VII SHAME	82
VIII HUNTER'S ROW	88
IX HATE	92
X THE LITTLE MAN IN THE BLACK OVERCOAT	101
XI THREE DIMPLES	108
XII MOVE ON, LITTLE LOG	120
XIII THE ELEGANT	132
XIV VALKA	149
XV VERA	169
XVI THE BABIES AND THE CANNON	188
XVII THE POWER BEHIND	201
XVIII IN THE TUNNEL	214
XIX LIBERALS	222
XX WHITES	233
XXI BURNING HOUSE	252
XXII ICE FACTORY	257
XXIII THE TEACHER	263
XXIV TVER CAVALRY SCHOOL	273
XXV MEMORIES	284
XXVI ALEC AND ALONA	300
XXVII LAST STAND	309
XXVIII A NEW COMMISSIONER	315
EPILOGUE	325

LANCES DOWN

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CHAPTER I

ROLLING HOME

NINETEEN-SEVENTEEN. The Russian soldier is going home! Suddenly the word has become an obsession. The war is over. The army stampedes toward the East, tens of thousands abreast from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Cursing and praying, in unison and dissonance, the mobs move, as if escaping from a prairie fire. Walls of houses and box-cars; trees along the road; cobblestones in the towns; rails on the tracks and waters of autumn rains—all tremble and repeat the echo of the single word: Home.

From mouths parched with fever or thirst the word comes slowly. It springs from lips pinched with fear or twisted with anger. Winds catch it and carry it over the fields and steppes. Cut across by an eastbound train, the winds rise up in fury to the sky, twist, lash the shaking carriages—then suddenly change their minds and join the train in its race. All of them abreast; sobbing winds and frenzied mass of steel flying the plains and piercing the forests. The wheels of the box-cars go clackety-clack "Home-home." The locomotive whistles shrilly, "Ho-o-ome." The gray human beings packed and hanging all over the train bark fast and loud, "Home." Against the rhythm of a four-year struggle, against "oath" and "honor," the word rises endlessly.

The wires along the side of the railroad whine like mile-long violins—the last year's grass in the field bows to the ground—the shaking earth sighs. . . .

As in a dream Alec and I were riding in the train. We had left behind us the war, the Kerensky revolution and the break-up of my Polish regiment. For days we had been squeezed into one corner—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday . . . hopeless to count them.

The train was so closely filled with men that the only empty spaces were the few inches above our heads. Soldiers were sitting or lying shoulder to shoulder all over the roofs, on every bumper, on the tender, on the engine. They looked like gray worms covering the vast running steel animal. They clung to its skin, they hung on its ribs, they even crawled over its belly. Smudged faces, suspended on the shafts close to the heavy and threatening wheels, peeked out from under the chassis of the carriages.

The Russian soldier was going home. The Kerensky revolution had tried to make him face the enemy once more. The peasant asked: "Who is the enemy? Why is he my enemy?" Not waiting for answers he had turned his back and like a colt kicked the war into the air. And like a colt he ran home.

We had heard the first feverish war shrieks, "For Faith, Emperor and Fatherland"; then Kerensky's hysterical "War to the Victorious End"; and the threatening mutter of breaking ranks, "Peace, Bread and Land." None of these could compare with what we heard now.

The long train shook itself vigorously, ran fast and belched clouds of smoke. On the run it shaved the walls of stations and tunnels as if trying to get rid of its biting, digging load. All for nothing. The dirty nails dug themselves into the steel skin and held fast. Often the train shot around a sharp curve. The frozen hands could no longer hold to railing or hooks. Soldiers were flung away. The mass oozed into their places and the train ran on.

Low roofs of sudden tunnels dashed out the brains of

men. Dead, they still clung to the nearest living comrade or to the ventilation pipe of a coach. The tunnel left behind, the live one shoved the dead over the edge of the roof, wiped the blood and brains from his face and crouched as flat as he could.

When the locomotive, breathing heavily, stopped somewhere at a small station, from all sides crowds of waiting men rushed to board every door and window. They ran alongside trying to find a pipe, a hook, a chain, four square inches on a step. In vain. The desperate soldiers already riding defended their places with their lives.

Once a man fell on his knees and prayed to a man like himself, another gray soldier—"For Christ's sake, let me take hold here! . . ."

The shivering, half-numb soldier holding the icy railing answered, "Can't, comrade. I'm going home—can't—can't." He shook his head.

The other, an elderly bearded man, opened and closed his fingers as if they were claws—searching for words to move the lucky comrade, and in a husky voice whispered: "Move over—please, brother. Just let me get hold with one hand. I'm going home, too."

The man on the steps burst into a frenzy at the mention of the word home, and spat abuse: "Don't come near me, louse. I'll kill you—I'll smash your skull!"

The one on the ground turned around hopelessly, praying under his breath: "Oh, Holy Christ and Mother of God—oh, Holy Ghost and saints in Heaven—what am I going to do—what am I going . . ." Tears ran over his gray beard and he crossed himself. Still he did not give up. "Brother dearest, Christ save you in His mercy, let me stand beside you! I only have four hundred miles more to go. And I'll be home! Four hundred little miles, brother!" Cautiously he approached to take hold of the other man's hands. But

the man was ready. And the others around him, the lucky ones, were ready too.

They all shouted at once and free hands reached for guns. The soldier on the ground jumped back. He plunged both hands under his shirt and pulled out a dirty bag hanging from a string around his neck. His fingers trembling, he unfastened it and emptied into his hand a piece of jewelry and a roll of bills. For six square inches of space on the bumper he was ready to pay all the money he had looted. This time he was merely pushed away by a blow from a heavy infantry boot. He sat on the ground and swayed in pain.

Flocks of soldiers even stood on the track with arms outspread in front of the locomotive, trying to hold back the starting train. But three men with guns stood over the engineer and ordered him to drive ahead through the crowd. Those who did not jump aside were crushed.

We had talked little, Alec and I. Inside the train days were without beginning and nights without end. Endless hours slipped off the spool and became entangled in dirt and noise. Men had lost count of days and weeks. With nightmares for blankets, they had slept standing up. They did not wash; they did not eat; their natural needs they satisfied where they stood.

Through dense smells there pierced one more defiling than all the others, the repulsive, sweet odor of the insane. They talked and sang and shouted, with madmen's persistence. If one man stopped to breathe, another filled in, until at last the monotone of noise caught on like a sickness and the vortex shouted without pause for a stretch of days and nights. Separate words which had no meaning. Shrieks of a deaf man who can not hear. Bawls of a mute who tries to speak. Like a man dying in delirium, trying to say everything he has to say before being silenced for ever.

Suddenly from cracked dry lips, black and square shaped, came, "Halt! My home is here!" Two black hands shot into the air and a head started to swing around and throw itself up high, until the red face was almost purple under its dirt. Through the broken window of the train the soldier saw his village three miles away beyond a little hill. He tried to get free of the crowd, to jump from the coach and run through the field and ditches straight home! But to get out was as hard as to get in. United into one mass of flesh, fear and jealousy, the crowd fought him back. Sometimes it took a man a whole day to reach the door, and then those who hung on there dared not give him room to jump out. If the train was standing still, four or five others were waiting to grab the empty place. And if the train was moving, it would have been suicide to let go. The lucky ones were those near the windows who were squirted out like peas from a pod. They fell down on an embankment or the platform of a station and if they were not badly hurt they laughed, silly and loud. They were near home! Many were carried days beyond their destination. Some were knocked down and trampled. Nobody cared what happened to the corpse except that it still used up room.

We had been lucky to get our corner. With most of our money and Alec's wrist-watch we had bribed a switchman. He pointed to a coach and said, "That's going to go on to the next train. Nobody knows it yet." When we sneaked on board we found it almost full. The switchman must have made a fortune.

Near us stood a boy of eighteen with blond curly hair and blue eyes. His face was haggard and so dirty that it was hard to make out his features. But when he smiled, he was just a kid. His ears stuck out, childish and sensitive, as if they wanted to catch everything that was going on. In a kit tied on his shoulder he had a loaf of old dry bread.

He bit a mouthful and chewed it deliberately, closing his eyes now and then. Smiling at me, his young mouth moved slowly. He swallowed and said, "Won't you have some? Please, comrade," the first time on that trip that I had heard the word please. I bit a mouthful. The bread was hard and smelled of perspiration. The boy smiled again and looked at Alec: "You too, comrade—please." Alec also took a bite. All three clamped together to the wall, one after another we bit from the one piece of bread held in the hand of the boy. His face was close to mine and I saw the shiny, tender hairs on his cheeks. It looked like the skin of a big ruddy peach. The train shook us mercilessly and steadily, the mob talked loud and the wheels drummed their anvil song.

The boy began to talk. He had been drafted a few months before. A speedy training, a war-time cotton uniform and he found himself in the trenches. Before he saw any fighting, the break-up came. At once he started for home.

"And at home, what?" asked Alec.

"I have a wife. We were married a week before I left for the trenches." The boy's voice sounded monotonous and dreamy. He paused a little. "My wife is very young. I'll see her soon. Maybe I'll see her to-night. We ought to be near Jitomir about eight."

"You didn't see much of her?"

"No, comrade. Just a night and a day." He stopped again and looked up at the ceiling as if trying to escape the gaze of our eyes, and the eyes of the men nearest who seemed to listen without interest. Perhaps they were asleep with their eyes wide open. Soon the boy ceased to feel anybody around him. He stopped eating the bread but held it in his hand and pressed it to his chest. His unseeing eyes shifted and stared through the window. I followed his gaze and began aimlessly to scan the fleeting view.

The train is running across a petrified and unreal landscape. It is the middle of the day but there is no sign of life. A dead ribbon of houses, trees, fences and fields flashes past. The movement of the train emphasizes the deadness of the country. Not a cow, not a horse in sight. Not even smoke from a chimney. Crows hang on to wet branches, afraid to fly, and a lonely dog leans shivering against a telegraph pole. The black unplowed earth is the only thing alive. It steams in places and seems to breathe deeply, as the train climbs the grades and rolls down the slopes. I can not look any more. The monotony of speed hypnotizes me. I turn to the young boy again. He speaks to himself.

"Just a night and a day I was with you, my dearest—just a night . . ." He blinks his eyes, looking straight into mine and shakes his head a few times. Coming back to reality, he tries to explain. "That's all the leave they gave me. I hardly had time to taste married life. I liked it though." Again he turns his head away. This time shyly. The veins on his temple are pulsating, his nostrils, thin and dirty, spread apart and stay immobile.

"Well, you'll have plenty of it now—you're healthy and alive," I comfort him.

The boy smiles with a clear radiant smile and speaks in a whisper, slowly, each word separately, almost as though he were praying. His clear red-rimmed eyes open wide and look past me so intently that his vision seems to materialize before him.

"I will. My wife is a beauty—a queen. . . . Like a dove—like a skylark—like a fragrant rose. . . ."

Now his voice is a thread. "White as sugar—sweet as honey. . . ." His upper lip trembles and words become almost voiceless—"Barbara . . . precious little Barbara. . . . My dearest one. . . ." The ecstasy of expectation. His lips still move but no words come out. His face is pale.

The locomotive whistles a long, sorrowful whistle.

Somebody near by, with his back toward us, lets out an unpleasant nasal screech. A red face, covered with blotches and pimples, appears, turning over its owner's shoulder, and a toothless mouth yanks out husky words amid spells of laughter.

"Look at him, mama's baby, in a hurry for a wife. . . . Ain't you lucky, you dog's litter!"

A few others turn their heads, laughing inanely. One says, "He's playing the fool. He wouldn't know what to do with a woman. . . ."

Red Face burbles rapturously: "What are you talking about? These pups are the best kind for women—they like 'em young. Me too." He licks his lips foolishly and laughs like a clown at his own joke.

The boy says quickly: "Comrade, please, it's loathsome to listen to you."

Another voice from a distance shouts: "Let him tell you how she liked him."

The boy flushes: "Shut up, you louse."

Red Face sniffs like a dog. "Come on, come on, tender feet, tell how you managed your little mare. . . ."

Alec suddenly gets angry. "Let him alone," he begins fiercely. But before he can finish, a little soldier who hardly reaches to the shoulders of the surrounding men, lifts his upturned nose and starts to sing:

"Three villages, two hamlets
And me the only man,
Seven husky girls—oh, my!
Now after them!"

The mob roars the chorus:

"The girls will hide in hay or brush.
I alone will find them.

The girls won't sleep before the dawn
I alone will maul them."

Alec says something else but it is drowned in noise. The men are caught up in the obscene words of the song and repeat the chorus again and again, wallowing and almost smacking their lips.

All heads around are now turned toward the boy and all eyes seem to gorge on his stripped emotion. He blushes and wriggles, squeezed by the shaking and mocking figures, throwing back insults in a childish excited voice. In the midst of the song individual voices shout coarse jokes.

Through the broken windows the flat red rays of the falling sun are cutting all the faces in half, making them almost unreal, as if the ugly ghosts of war with half-torn heads have come to life again. The noise becomes unbearable.

"How many . . ."

"Did she tell you how . . ."

"Pull his shirt out . . ."

"Don't cry, you pup . . ."

"Take me to your Barbara . . ."

The boy begins to scream: "Let me alone! Christ! Let me alone!" He tries to move but can not. He can hardly free his arm. The pimpled Red Face throws his arms over the heads of the two nearest men and with dirty fingers tickles the boy under the chin. Imitating a female voice, he meows, catlike: "Barbara"—until the chorus of voices takes it up after him and pounds in unison over the boy's head: "Barbara—Barbara—" mercilessly, "Barbara—Barbara. . . ."

I feel suffocated. I try to move. The packed mass is pressing so close that every shake of the coach forces the breath out of me. I have to rise on my toes and lift my

hands to my throat. Except in concert with the mob, it is impossible to move. I must contort alike with the whole. Even passive resistance takes a dreadful effort. Alec gives up and turns his face to the wall. I try not to look into the howling wide-open mouths.

Suddenly the boy yells: "Let me alone . . . I!" I look. Red Face is tickling him. Men around burst into a hilarious yelling.

"Stop it!" I try to hit the nearest with my fist. I can not swing my arm. Alec is trying to get out his gun. His face, red as a beet, with its open blotch of a mouth, grimaces mechanically with every shout he forces out: "Rabble . . . Rabble . . . I!"

At last other voices begin to rise above the pandemonium. At the end of the coach one huge soldier a head higher than the others is yelling:

"Let the kid alone—you beasts!"

"Comrades, he's sick! Are you devils?"

"Have you no hearts, you hyenas?"

By now the boy is screaming hysterically.

It gets darker. The train stops suddenly. The whole mass of us shake and for a moment are pushed painfully to one side. The clanking of wheels is no more. Different kinds of noises come from outside. Dark shadows run along the train under the windows. "Where are we, comrade?" And a distant answer comes from somebody running: "Five miles from Jitomir."

The word Jitomir spurs the boy with the violence of a steel lash. "Let me out—let me go!" he shouts. "Jitomir—I'm home . . . home!" Like a bird gripped in a fist he tries to free himself, throwing his body in all directions and hammering with his head against everything near him. "I'm home! I'm home!" With his hands he tries to push away the pawing claws of those who tickle him. The word

Jitomir gives him strength to move a yard or so toward the broken window. Digging his fingers into some one's head he pulls himself forward. Once he succeeds in rising on his hands above the shoulders of the others. His clothes are torn to pieces. His overcoat is in rags and his dirty gray shirt pulled out. But he can not move farther. Exhausted, he struggles about two yards away from us, gasping for air.

The darkness descends and the mob quiets down a bit. In the farther corner the song still continues. The train jerks, grits its iron teeth and starts again. The boy wails again: "Let me out! Let me out! . . ." The train gains speed. The wheels drum their taps once again and for the next five hours do not cease.

The boy did not reach his village, nor his young wife that night. When somewhere early in the morning the train stopped again, he tried once more to move toward the window and again moved only a few feet. But toward the end of the next day the bored soldiers turned their mockery on Red Face, and elaborately helped the boy nearer to the door. The mob at that end of the car was kinder. The tall gaunt soldier who had defended him all along, and those around patted the boy on the shoulders, pulling and pushing him until he managed to jump out of the train while it was moving slowly along a sand embankment. I saw him fall down. He got up at once, turned around, and, limping, began to walk back.

He was going home—at last.

As if asking his forgiveness, the mob in the car now sang another song. A long lonely song about an endless night, the sorrow of darkness and heart's desire. The voices sounded natural and free. They harmonized the tune without effort and it added wistfulness to the slow accompaniment of the gently clanking wheels.

"Let me burn my wick
In lonely fire—all night through
It will scorch my heart
In maddening desire—all for you. . . .

"I'll shut the shutters
Of my only window for ever.
I'll put to sleep in ashes—
My charred heart—my only song for you."

CHAPTER II

MOSCOW

ALEC and I stood in front of the railway station trying to believe that we were actually in Moscow. The train belched forth hundreds of excited and shouting gray figures. They talked, they waved their hands, they helped one another to tie bags and overcoats, they rushed, they walked, they ran. They poured past us in mad flurries of excitement. Some bumped into us without heed, as if feeling no obstacle. Gazing ahead with fixed eyes, they continued on their relentless movement home.

I looked at Alec. He said, "It's true. We've got our feet on the cobblestones of Moscow." Tears in his eyes, he whispered, "Moscow..." I nodded silently. He walked a few steps and sat on the low embankment of the station wall. As if his head were a heavy load, he took it in both hands and rested his elbows on his knees, his eyes staring straight ahead. Suddenly his whole body loosened in a queer way, as if broken. When I went over and sat down, I understood why. At once my feet lost their strength. The bones began to tremble numbly, the blood throbbed in my toes and my soles began to itch painfully. I could not have stood up at that moment to save my life. Like Alec, I had to hold up my slack head to keep it from falling down to my knees.

"This is the first time we've relaxed in five days and six nights," Alec said.

"We'd better rest here for a while. I don't think I can get up now."

"No. Never mind, in an hour we'll be all right."

Neither of us knew whether we still had a home. It was late afternoon. We looked around the familiar square of the Kursk Station and into its branching streets and avenues. It was as if we were looking into the face of a friend, yesterday young and joyous, now suddenly become tired and old. Three years of war and revolution had turned Moscow into an ancient drab.

Peering steadily, my eyes picked out a tea-house where once I had eaten, a curio shop where I had hunted for old prints. Thus I came slowly out of my dream until at last something snapped within me and whispered to awakening reason. "You know where you are. You have been here many times—long ago. This is Moscow. Moscow before the dusk. . . ."

Alec beckoned to a street urchin and bought a package of cigarettes of the cheapest kind. Before the war you got ten for five coppers. Alec handed over five rubles, enough to pay twenty-five times the old price, and still leave some change. The boy shook his head.

"You got a bargain, comrade. After to-day, I'm selling 'em for ten rubles."

"Why?" I asked.

"Aw, you know—Class Struggle," answered the twelve-year-old ragamuffin. His bright alert face did not smile.

We could not help laughing. "What do you know about the class struggle?"

"Plenty—and about so much more." He held his small hand two feet above the pavement.

"Well, come on, tell us."

"Hell, don't you know?" Then, looking straight into our eyes and seeing that we were not laughing at him, he came close and with the help of his dirty fingers began to explain.

“Listen, comrades. The revolution showed us about classes. Two classes. One works—one don’t. Them that work must wipe out them that don’t. Well, to hell with it!” He squatted on the ground, looking up at us and making childish, excited faces. He spoke low, as if he were playing “pirates” and planning a raid into a neighbor’s apple orchard. “That’s all the bunk. There’s sixty-two thousand classes, not just two. You’re in one class. I’m in another. I got a whole class all to myself. And all the kids around here,” he looked condescendingly around the square, “they got their own class. My mother and the other old women—that’s a class too. My sister and her friends—more class—and what a class! Yes, comrades, we all work but we don’t belong to the same class. Get me?”

We nodded.

He chopped the air with his small hand. “Aw, how can you tell who works and who don’t? Everybody says he works. And then fights everybody else. Lousy bastards! Me too they fight. I’m sick of ’em, always gabbling, ‘Don’t speculate in cigarettes!’ ‘Don’t go around selling booze!’ When the militia catches me they beat me up. They take my cigarettes away. They call me a wolf-pup. And all because I’m in one class and they’re in another. We both work, don’t we? We’re both revolutionary, ain’t we? But we fight all the time just the same. Same with you. I don’t know you, but I’m wise. I fight you before I even know who you are.”

“So you charged us five rubles for a package of cigarettes?” I said.

“Sure. I can see you’re from the trenches. Well, then, you’ve got money. I got to make my profit on the first package I sell. Maybe that’s all I’ll ever have a chance to sell. See? Ten of ’em in my pockets. But suppose a bloodsucker militiaman grabs me and takes away the lot.

I'm fixed. That five rubles you gave me is three times what I paid for the whole ten. My class licked your class and the militia's class. That's why it's a class struggle."

"What do you do with the money?" asked Alec.

The boy spat on the ground. "Damn it, I take care of my mother. She's in a different class but she's too old to fight. . . ."

Suddenly he sprang up. "And tell me, don't she work? All her life—like a dog. But they fight her, too. She needs rubber overshoes. They tell her, 'Go to the cooperative store.' But at the store they say, 'We're expecting some in two months.' And then comes a lot of sleet and rain. Me—I know a place where there's whole boxes of overshoes right here in Moscow. I tell her, 'Go ask them.' But she's too old. She can't fight. So I sell twenty bottles of booze and *buy* her a pair of rubber overshoes. Dandy, too. . . ."

From the depths of his pocket he fished out an old stepped-on butt of a cigar, licked it all around with his tongue and wrapped it in a piece of newspaper which he picked up from under his feet. From another pocket he took a cigarette lighter made of a cartridge shell, gave a light to Alec, then to me and was ready to light his cigar. I made a move to stop him.

"Oh, yes, I know," he said. "Never three smokes from one light . . . I know. I went to war, too." He blew out the lighter and struck it again. Between the words he puffed his crippled cigar butt. "Yes, me too. Took some cocaine with me. Sold it out—good price, too."

He was puffing diligently, his childish mouth pouting and making sucking noises, his eyes greedily squinting down on the flame of the lighter. He could have sucked a milk bottle with the same expression. His mop of walnut hair swayed over his nose. At last he got the cigar going and blew out pungent smoke through his nostrils. He put his

hands into the pockets of his large infantry overcoat, which had been chopped off with a knife to make it shorter, and proudly rocked back and forth from his heels to his toes.

"I made good money there—yes, comrade—good money. But war's lousy for business. No cooperation. That cocaine money—I took it and bought a box of new Spanish automatics from a sergeant. He was on an arsenal train. Two dozen of 'em. I thought I'd bring 'em down here to Moscow and sell out for a couple of hundred thousand. But what does the son-of-a-bitch sergeant do? He takes the money and squeals to the gendarmes on me. They grab my pistols and give me a lashing in the bargain. Bastards! No cooperation at all."

Smoking away at his cigar, he looked a caricature of a commercial genius complaining about the tariff.

"Well, so long. Need anything else, comrades? Show you where you can get anything you need. Booze?—grub?—cocaine?—women? Need any silk underwear?"

"No, thanks," we answered.

"Well, so long." And he strutted across the square.

Alec looked after him. "Ever see anything like that before?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"War isn't half so bad as what comes after it," said Alec.

We had reached our goal. We were in Moscow. The regiment with its discipline was gone. But gone also was the world in which we had lived for four years. A world filled, not with soldiers, automatons of war, but with men—human beings. All of them—Poles, Russians, Austrians, Germans, Hungarians—seemed like lost friends; like comrades in the tedious and uncertain job of destroying one another. The job was now finished, the gang was dispersed. And out of all the humbug and hullabaloo of the war, one sad thought

was left—where are the boys who were with us and against us during these last years?

With the Emperor's abdication we had been thrown into a new kind of existence without our consent or will. We knew that it had just begun and that it would not be over for some time to come. We were grown-ups and, caught in a grown-up's game, we'd have to stand it. We passed no judgment on the orders. We did not accuse. We did not complain. But this little urchin vender upset us. I wanted to look around for a policeman, teacher, parent. I got up and sat down again. Alec smiled sadly.

"Forget about it, Father," using the nickname I had earned at twenty-four as the oldest cadet of the military school, "it's only beginning. We can't do anything this minute."

Carefully we smoked our flimsy cigarettes, waiting. I knew that Alec did not want to go home. The abdication of the Emperor, the wreck of the Imperial Army, the end of the war, the growing revolution—all these meant for him a personal failure. He did not want to go home as a failure.

Now we were almost alone in the square. Under the walls and fences and in the little garden in the middle, stray gray figures were leaning or lying. Those were the men who, like ourselves, were tired, who were ill, or who had to wait for another train.

My ears began to hurt as though something were pressing against them. "Alec, don't your ears feel queer?"

He answered: "Yes, it's because the noise of the train has stopped."

It was true. The close wall of human voices had fallen away, the tap of wheels on rails had ceased. The tender, humming atmosphere of city noises came to us from a distance. The racket of the carriages on the cobblestones

sounded like music played on many xylophones. And the hum of voices of normal human beings was like the sound of bees' wings, busy, low and kind. After that week of shrill continuous noise, the quiet in which we now found ourselves was so hospitable it moved us almost to tears.

I caught myself speaking in a whisper. I got a sensuous pleasure from being able to speak without straining my voice. Sweet to use a moderate amount of sound, to put some feeling into my sentences.

I said: "Aren't you glad to go home and see your people?"

"No, I'm not." Alec slowly shook his head. "That's what makes me sit here, and that's what's going to make it damn hard to walk the twenty blocks to my mother's house."

"But, Alec, you have a home. I used to think I had one too, but now that I've been with Poles for the last two years, I don't feel that my home here in Moscow is mine any more. Patriotism is a queer thing."

"Well . . ." He groped for words; then, straightening his back, looked far ahead of him over the roofs of the houses. "There are two kinds of patriotism. The patriotism of tradition and the patriotism of the emotions. You are patriotic from emotion. I am a patriot by tradition. Poland, object of your patriotism, did not exist when you were born. It was only a word. But you grew up to love it. It doesn't exist any more now than it did before, it's still farther away from you than it was when you were a child. Yet you keep right on getting excited about it. You're ready to die for it."

"True," I said, "but how is that different from you?"

"Altogether different. In my patriotism there's nothing abstract; everything is concrete and real. And like everything concrete and real, it's breakable. Russia did exist for three hundred years before I was born. It was built out of this earth and these stones, with those golden cupolas

of the churches; it was built by people in the uniforms I have always known and always loved. My Russia was built by people in the uniforms I taught myself to respect and adore, the same uniform which I wore and which I had to destroy. No court martial tore off my shoulder-straps. No enemy took away my insignia. I had to tear them off myself."

His face flushed with remembered shame. And he waited in motionless silence before he went on.

"Look at that town in front of you. I'm afraid it will be demolished just like that uniform of mine. It's breakable—everything that's real is breakable. And when I say that I don't want to go home it's because I'm afraid that too will be broken."

We sat for another hour, scarcely speaking a word. We were like swimmers, castaways, who, after a fight in a tumultuous sea, are thrown up on a shore and, exhausted, lie on the ground, unable to make the next step. We were safe in the comforting noise of the city, which to our shattered nerves was like a mother's lullaby.

Alec began to speak again: "Father, you're a thousand times luckier than I am. Nothing can break your Polish dreams and your beliefs because they don't exist materially. My dreams are all tangible, all real, and they are all shattered to pieces. Look out for the time when yours will crystallize and become real things."

The electric lamps were beginning to come to life in the streets, coming on slowly like the footlights on a stage.

Somewhere far off a bell began to ring. A church in the outskirts starting its vesper song in a hurry. It was a small church and insignificant, and its bells were harsh. They were made of cheap brass, good enough for simple people, but not exalted enough for the center of the Empire, the eternal resting-place of kings. Loud and inconsiderate these

common bells threw their brazen voices. What did they care who might be trying to rest or who might be disturbed by their notes? They acted like a gang of children home from school, throwing their books in a corner, jumping on the floor, clapping their hands and paying no heed to the grandfather who is dozing in front of the fire.

The old white churches in the center of Moscow were like the grandfathers. Some of them had stood for five hundred years on the highest hill of the ancient town, so that their old stones that covered the bones of saints could enjoy the full warmth of the sun. Hearing the young rattly noise of those small churches on the outskirts, they too had to straighten up as if recalling that it was time to end the rest and answer with their deep, settled voices the noise of the youngsters. Their bells rang out in dignified splendor.

Like a breeze through a field of wheat they broke over us. I felt as though I could almost see the sound waves rolling along the streets and over the roofs. I watched them as they disappeared among the far-away hills.

Slowly then came the voices of the bells of the Kremlin. These were made from the bronze cannon which Napoleon had lost in the campaign of 1812. Bronze mixed with silver and gold thrown into the melting-pots by French patriots. Tense, head held high, Alec listened. The glory of Imperial Russia seemed to send him its farewell, seemed to sound the retreat, the funeral taps. Alec's heart saluted in sorrowful silence.

Soon more bells joined the ringing song. Bells molded as monuments to victorious wars and enemies overcome, enemies from far-away Asia, rich with precious metals. These bells were loaded with silver and gold. Their voices were almost like singers' voices: noble, trained, and with a tremolo of emotion behind them. "The day is over," they sang, a different tune, "just like any other day, like thou-

sands which we have seen already. Come and listen to us. Stop your hustle and hurry. Millions of those to whom we have sung don't hear us any more, and the day will come when you won't hear us either." Alec understood and dropped his head.

They used to say that the churches of Moscow were "forty times forty"; in each were bells—six bells—twelve bells—twenty-four bells.

Along the streets and alleys you could see bent old figures, leaning on walking sticks or old umbrellas, holding now and then to a tree or to a wall. Called out by the bells, they were moving slowly and steadily to all the "forty times forty" churches. They were the old people, people at the end of their lives. They also understood the voices of the bells, understood their call, their warning—"Before long you may not hear us any more." And as if to help and guide all these aged people, soon the whole town was covered with a net of bells crisscrossing and racing and jumping over one another.

By this time the sun was well down beyond the Sparrow Mountains, tucking itself into the red blanket of clouds and pulling down a huge curtain of darkness over the city. Not for a long time, though. Before the dark fringe touched the pavements the strings of lanterns rose carefully and hesitatingly. Like gentle ushers they stood on all the streets and alleys and crossroads showing to the tired and weary people the way to their homes or churches.

Sudden and merciless a shrill police whistle pierced the serenity. Our little street urchin dashed across the square, his overcoat flapping behind him like the wings of a scared chicken. A black-clad militiaman raced along after him. The boy reached the fence, climbed up on it and stood, poised a moment, arms outspread, a fantastic silhouette that seemed to blot out the whole of old Moscow. Shrill as the

continuous whistle, he screamed, "Don't lose your pants, you pimp . . l" and disappeared over the other side of the fence.

The bells died out as if offended.

Alec got up and silently shook my hand. We looked into each other's eyes. Not a word was spoken. We had reached Moscow and we parted.

CHAPTER III

GREETINGS

I WONDERED where I should go. To the apartment I'd had before the war? That was the address I had given to the boys of the regiment who might need a shelter. Was it safe? I had signed the lease with my real name, the Polish name by which I was also known in the army. The lease was in somebody's files, probably seldom looked up, but by some chance it might be discovered by the revolutionists. It might not. After all, everybody knew me under my stage name.

Would any one trace the lieutenant of a rebellious Polish regiment to the apartment of an actor of the Moscow Art Theater? Still, perhaps I had better go first to the Theater. I had friends there who could help me.

It was a waste of worry. I was a drop of water in the ocean. Nobody was looking for me. I was no longer in the dark forests of Volyn and Podolia, hunted by the Reds, hunting them.

Slowly I began to walk toward the center of the town. One street after another opened up before me with familiar outlines. Turning the corners, my eyes searched for places I knew well, with the feeling that I ought to greet each of them with joy. Instead, I found myself staring sadly, almost apologetically. Moscow had become stiff, dark and nervous, as if on the lookout. I felt sorry for the ancient town.

In the days before the war I did not love Moscow, I did not hate it. I was charmed and lulled by it. More than

any other place in the world, Moscow was magnanimous. It caressed and soothed those who walked its streets. It was a city of broad smiles, of singing speech, of tender names freely given. The driver called the horses of his sleigh "little falcons" and his customer "my beautiful sir." In the winter it was a city of silent speed. You could not hear the hoofs of horses on the snow or the screech of sleigh's runners. You saw only a sculptured form flashing past in silver dust. In the summer that swift silence changed to loud immobility. Too lazy to walk in the sun, the ice-cream vender, holding on his head his heavy barrel wrapped in white towels, would stand for hours and melodiously yell in perfect musical phrase, "Su-u-u-gary . . . ice . . . c-r-e-a-m."

Inharmonious contrasts, bright and sudden, flashed by.

In shabby basement rooms the descendants of Genghis Khan came to Tartar horse butcher-shops and bought the steaks of young colts as a delicacy. A people come down in the world, these Tartars. Remnants of wild hordes which had held Russia in bondage for one hundred years, they had turned into peaceful and shabby settlers scattered through almost every big city. Still wearing their own national dark Asiatic garb, they walked from house to house and bought old clothes, hats, furs and shoes. On top of their small skull-caps they sometimes piled a tower of a dozen different sorts of second-hand headgear, the most convenient way to carry two derbies, three women's hats, one silk top-hat and a few felt and fur caps. Being Mohammedans, they were smooth and shrewd, but they never lied, and often went to extremes in their honesty. One of them once bought a pair of old trousers from me for twenty-five coppers. Next day he brought me back a ruble which he had found in one of the pockets.

The horse butcheries were their business offices, clubs and

exchanges. They got all their meals there. Silent, Oriental, before they paid for the horse meat, they would cut off small pieces with pocket knives and chew them, smacking their lips. With the savage package dripping through its wrappings, they had only to walk a few blocks to pass houses where, in splendor, rich private collections of Cézanne and Manet listened in bewilderment to the exquisite French chatter of assembled guests.

On Saturdays, a patriarchal family would enter the public baths, the stout, bearded merchant leading the way, followed by mother-in-law, wife and children, for the family's weekly bath. Three streets farther, three theaters were presenting Shakespeare, Schiller and Molière.

French cook, English butler, Russian wet-nurse, Italian valet, Caucasian body-guard and Tartar janitor, all in one household spread out like a feudal baronial nest, played poker in warm and roomy basements.

The best telephone service in the world, the worst sanitation.

In "Shrewd Market" derelicts slept in night lodgings on bags of damp straw, five coppers for a bag overnight. Prostitutes hunted by police, were led herded in one flock, to the jeering of the mob, into the precinct station for registration.

On Easter Eve, glowing candles, carried from church to home, a custom dating back to Perun, god of lightning, whose fire was kept always alive on the hearth. Multitudes dressed for a holiday, holding in cupped hands a tiny candle and guarding it against the wind, now and then walking backward, bending over the flickering lights. The people's faces, lighted by tiny orange-pink flames were a thousand floating Rembrandt portraits. When the wind died, the people turned and walked straight again. It was like a monotonous, mysterious dance.

One never knew what Moscow would produce, when it would hurt or when caress. Moscow was a kind stepmother to me, who gave me the best of herself and to whom I, not being her blood son, gave all the enthusiasm of my young years. Because I wasn't her own child I had to know her better than others. Her singing manner of speech was hard for me to master. Her ways I studied as one does those of a dear host who considers you almost a member of the family, who befriends and showers you with gifts. Moscow's gifts to me were generous gifts I could not forget.

Now, coming back to her streets as to old friends, I was thinking, "What am I now—Pole or Russian? Where do I belong? I am still in the Polish service. If I should receive an order from my commanding officer to-morrow, I'd have to obey even against my closest friends. Even in this town where I have spent the best years of my life."

When we had been fighting Reds in forests and hamlets, I did not think of them as Russians. They were to me Red riffraff. "Am I still among the Reds or are the people whom I see in the streets and through the lighted windows a different kind of people?" And quickly I answered myself, "They must be different. They *are* different. Remember all the kindnesses they showed to you. Remember their hospitality. Remember their culture. Remember the old friends in the Theater who looked at you with kind eyes and now and then said to you: 'When will you get rid of that Polish accent of yours?' Not unkindly, but meaning, 'As long as you are serving in the Russian Theater, you have to sacrifice everything for the sake of perfection.'"

I listened to the voices in the street. The Moscow dialect; the dialect which has a more tender, singing quality than Italian; more rumbling, manly consonants than Scotch; and at times a more speedy tempo than French. Now that

I had spoken Polish for so long, would I remember all the tricks of the Moscow brogue?

But then my other half started to speak, and that other half spoke deep from the first memories of childhood: the first words of my mother; the first lullaby songs; the first secret lessons in history, lessons which were barred from books by law; my first feeble efforts with pen and primer. "Pole, Polish, Poland,"—at home, before I went to school, where Poland was reduced to a nonentity and known as the Vistula River Region. As one might call the United States the Mississippi River Region.

The side-streets were dark. From a lighted window a shaft of light falling across the pavement turned them into woodcuts of black and white. The people, for some unknown reason, were walking in the middle of the road.

Now and then a carriage with one horse—an "after the war horse," or one so bad that it had escaped all conscription. It trotted laboriously with a clackety-clack on cobblestones, unable to catch up with a man walking hurriedly home after his day's work.

I was tired. Almost everybody was passing me. I leaned against the wall and rested. In front of me, at my feet, lay a dull soft circle of lighted pavement. Part of it was in the shade. A man was kneeling there, his head pressed to an iron post, his hands embracing it, his whole being almost blended into shadow with the post, as if it were a crucifix. People passed him by. Wheels of a carriage rolled a foot away from him. I gazed at him steadily. He never budged. I stood and waited. I don't know for what.

Fifteen minutes passed. The man moved. He crossed himself, got up and picked from the ground a small tin pail, one of those toy pails that children play with in the sand. He stood at least six feet six, barefoot, in white pants, an infantry overcoat, the little pail in one hand. No shirt, no

cap. His head was small, though long bushy hair made it seem a normal size. He had a short white blond beard and mustache and the overhead light of a lantern made his face, covered with deeply carved wrinkles, look like a mushroom.

Suddenly I shuddered. His eyes from behind deep dark caverns were looking straight at me. From the distance of eight feet I could feel the intensity of their gaze—a sort of insane steadiness. People walked between the man and me. He paid no attention to them. Slowly he moved toward me. I felt myself shivering. In the niche of the wall he cornered me. He brought his face close to mine by bending his neck like a bull,—he was so much taller than I.

“A warrior?” he asked in a tense voice.

I nodded.

“Repeat after me,” he closed his eyes and spoke in a monotonous voice as if saying an old prayer for the thousandth time: “Holy Mother Earth and the swamp devils, imps and vampires, the sacred ass which carried Jesus Christ into Jerusalem and the highest command of the Russian Imperial Army; also Saint Apollinaris and the Holy Bayonet and the Blessed Poisonous Gases; the souls of all German children and the dogs who lost their masters; the innocent Mother Virgin Empress Dowager and God Almighty himself; the angry and powerful Lamb of Compassion who is asleep right now in Mazur’s Lakes, help and preserve you, lost warrior, for centuries and for ever. . . .”

If he had spoken another word I would have screamed. But he finished and opened his eyes. They looked tired. In a reasonable tone, he said, “Let me wash the human blood off your hands, warrior.” He took my hand. It was cold and dirty. “The blood’s an inch thick,” the man said and took a dripping piece of rag from his pail that was half filled with water. He wiped my hand with the rag and

water. Then he washed the other hand. "Well, that's that. There is no more blood, warrior, your hands are clean. You can eat your food with them now. Mine still have a little blood—see." He showed me the perfectly clean palm of his hand. "But I'll wash it off—probably to-morrow morning. Lucky you met me, warrior. It's nasty—that blood on your hands. Good luck. Good-by." He took his pail and went away.

I looked at my hands. A new man at my side laughed. He was the janitor of the house I was leaning against. "Did that nut wash your hands, comrade?"

I said, "Yes."

"Funny, isn't he? No harm in him though." He laughed again. "Some soldiers beat him to a pulp. He never gives up. Goes around and washes their hands. A fool. But harmless. Why should any one beat him?"

Again I said, "Yes," and with a painful effort began to move my legs. Each step was torture. I asked myself, "Who is this madman—Pole or Russian? He must be Russian—he spoke with Volodimir accent. Why then does Polish speech still ring in my ears? It can't be his!" I shook my head and came back to my senses. I realized that I was hearing Polish spoken by the passers-by. I walked behind them for a while and listened to the familiar words and sounds. This was unusual in Moscow. These must be refugees from Russian Poland who had come to escape the German occupation. They looked bewildered and strange here. Their clothes were different, their faces, their language. They seemed out of place. I knew that they could not feel at home in Moscow; that they felt themselves "a foreign-born element," as the reactionary Russian papers had always called them. They looked hungry and poorly dressed in their snappy Warsaw clothes. They were cold, and conscious of their speech. Falsely nonchalant, they

swaggered with the good-humored braggadocio of the Pole, the "to hell with everything" attitude that makes them Irish among Slavs and French where there are no real Frenchmen on hand.

I recalled how, when I was a child, some one from abroad smuggled an old lithograph to our house. It showed Napoleon under a little group of trees in Spain, sitting on a drum in front of the fire. On his knees were maps, and "He" was studying them, deeply engrossed in to-morrow's battle. Marshals, generals, adjutants and a sentry stood at attention around him, realizing the seriousness of the moment. Before the advancing army was the ravine of Somo-Sierra. Spaniards were on the other side of it and it was considered almost impossible to attack them through the narrow winding passage. What to do?

My mother holds the picture with one hand and I hold it with the other and she tells me a story. Into that tense picture steps, swaying slightly, a swashbuckling Polish Lighthorse cavalryman. He is whistling the March of Legions and his cap is perched on one side. He saunters slowly with a wide-legged cavalry stride, and from under the nose of the Emperor picks up a burning piece of coal. Calmly he applies it to his huge pipe, and puffs until he surrounds himself with clouds of vile smoke which make the Emperor frown and cough. He tosses the piece of coal back, turns on his heel and, clinking his spurs, starts away. One of the marshals calls out angrily after him: "Lighthorse, can't you even thank the Emperor for the fire?" Lighthorse, without taking out his pipe, and hardly turning his head, points his dirty thumb toward the ravine of Somo-Sierra and answers calmly: "I'll thank him to-morrow, over there."

There was scarcely a day that I did not ask my mother to get the lithograph out of the drawer before I went to bed and to tell me its story once more. Now I connected this

with the Poles on the streets of Moscow, striding ahead of me. "They also have borrowed a fire from this town," I thought. "Where will they offer their thanks? And have I offered mine? Have I thanked the Russians for the 'fire' they gave me—have I?"

The houses on my right were moving slowly and more slowly. I had to rest again. I felt empty. For a while I couldn't think of anything. Suddenly I was startled by a woman's voice. Something in the way she spoke made me lift my head. It was a young street-walker. She looked at me and smiled unhappily. To make her speak once more I asked her some question. She answered in broken Russian, with an accent I recognized immediately.

I said in Polish: "Where are you from?"

She blushed, mumbled, "Excuse me, sir," and moved away like a kicked dog. I followed and tried to make her speak again. Walking with me she was at first shy and ashamed. She answered my questions in short words. She was not a professional street-walker. She was one of those thousands of "unknown" one does not speak about, one does not remember in war history. Refugees, lost family, no friends, no place to go, strange city, could not find work, could scarcely speak Russian, hungry.

She did not belong on the street. I doubted if she were successful. Probably hardly making her living. How otherwise? Broad, a little clumsy, straw-white hair neatly twisted into a knot on the back of her head, with the solid walk of a girl who can carry two milk-pails at once. Whom can she attract? What does she know of her trade? I could bet she wears a cross or medallion of the Holy Virgin on her bosom. She had that kind of face: open, round, with colorless eyelashes, a childish mouth and a few missing teeth. She was ashamed of the gaps and kept shielding her mouth with a gloved hand. The gloves were not a pair.

She asked me: "Where are you from?"

"From the First Lancers. Polish Lancers."

She gasped and looked at me as if I were the Archangel Gabriel. "Lancer!" she said. "You are a Polish Lancer! Oh, my God, my God!" She bent her head down and shook it as if trying to get rid of a tear. Then, "Sir Lancer, what will happen now to Poland?"

"It won't perish while we're alive," I answered and smiled at her. She smiled too. We walked in silence for a few minutes. I could not do anything for her. I did not have any money. I was hungry and did not know whether I had a home. Finally I stopped, shook hands with her and said: "I'm sorry, I wish I had something to give you. . . ."

"Oh, Sir Lancer, please don't . . . don't. God'll repay you just the same." And she walked quickly away. I had gone forty or fifty steps on my way when she appeared again alongside me. She had run to catch me, and between short breaths she whispered, "Sir Lancer—Sir Lancer . . ."

"Yes . . ." I said.

"I have a ruble here—won't you take it? Please . . . please . . ." She disappeared so fast that I could not make any answer.

Dragging my feet I started on my way again. I have that ruble still.

It was eleven o'clock when I reached my apartment. No one noticed me as I went in. I walked up two flights and rang the bell quietly. No answer. Once more I rang. I heard a shuffling of bare feet and a careful childish voice. It was the little girl servant, an orphan who had been in my house for four years, and who had come as a twelve-year-old peasant girl to learn the maid's trade. Now from behind the door came her high-pitched twang, "Who's there?"

"It is I," I answered.

"Oh, my God!" And the door opened.

There she stood, a little bit of a thing, wrapped up in a shawl from her shoulders down to the floor, looking up at me and trembling. "The Gates of Heaven and the Holy Ghost protect us! Sir, you are dead!"

I gave her my hand. She did not take it. "You are dead. I have already ordered a mass for your soul."

"Well, maybe it helped me—here I am, alive."

"No, *he* swore you were dead. Your horse is alive—but you are dead."

I didn't like it. "Stop your foolery. I'm alive and I'm here. Who told you I was dead?"

"A soldier who came yesterday. He said he was your orderly."

I almost shouted, "Watzek! Where is he?"

"In my bed," the girl answered coyly. "He came yesterday, fell into the bed and hasn't woke up yet."

"Let him sleep," I said, closed the door and went around my four rooms switching on all the lights. The girl followed me. I wandered through the lonely rooms, recognizing a chair, opening this book and the other, looking at one photograph, then at the next, as if they all were strange and unknown to me. The girl began to cry noiselessly.

"Why are you crying? I am here and all right."

She sniffed and wiped her nose with the palm of her hand. "Oh, sir, you are so dirty," she said.

I didn't feel like arguing with her on that point. "Where is the dog?" I asked her.

"Joy's in the kitchen."

"Bring him in," I said. He was a Great Dane whom I had raised from a blind pup on a handkerchief soaked in milk, and until I went to war he had never been away from me. He came through the open door, gray, large and taut. For a second he stood and growled.

Quietly I said, "Joy, don't you recognize me?"

At the sound of my voice he shuddered as if hit by lightning. Slowly, sniffing, he moved closer, his tail trembling and his ears standing straight up. With his cold nose he touched my hand and whined in a pitiable way, as a child sobs. He put his head against my thigh and shivered, swaying on his hind legs. Suddenly he made a movement with his head from right to left, ran around me, stopped for a second, squatted low. And after that was over, he lay in shame on the floor and lifted his forepaw.

The maid was again at the door, speaking seriously, almost in horror: "He never did that before. You left him housebroken and he's been perfectly housebroken since. My, my—he must love you!"

"Make a fire in the fireplace," I said.

After this was done, my dog, Joy, and I sat on the floor in front of the fireplace, the same way I used to sit in the forest during many cold nights. Without speaking to each other, like two friends, we gazed steadily into the dancing flames. . . .

Early in the morning Watzek came and brought me tea. He stopped at the door and clicked his heels: "God be with you, Sir Lieutenant!"

I got up. I had slept the whole night through right on the floor. Joy slept beside me. "For centuries and for ever, Watzek!" We shook hands and laughed like foolish children.

"Forget about that 'Sir Lieutenant' for a while, Watzek."

"I know, I know, Sir Lieutenant. It's only when we are alone."

"Thanks for the tea—very much." I grinned at him.

"Happy to try, sir. . . ." He started, looked at me: "Oh, hell," he finished with a sigh and tiptoed out of the room.

CHAPTER IV

THE MOSCOW ART THEATER

THE next morning at nine I started for the Theater. I felt strange in my old civilian clothes. The long trousers seemed fluttery and drafty, my half shoes flimsy and my felt hat effeminate. I thought everybody was laughing at me. An infantry colonel came along. I jerked my hand to salute and instead foolishly buttoned and unbuttoned my coat. And then both my old garters snapped at once and trailed behind me, beyond hope of repair. I had to stop in a doorway, take them off and throw them away. An old woman hurrying along the street saw them. She stooped with difficulty, picked them up, looked them over, and put them in her hand-bag. Throwing cautious glances, she scurried away, as if afraid that some one might stop her.

Suddenly I found myself walking faster, almost in a panic, toward the Theater. Everybody else was hurrying too, marching, swinging, overtaking one another, an unnatural sight for Moscow. It had been a lively town before, but never in a hurry. What had happened to it? Faster, faster—to get somewhere. Not to miss anything. Overtake every one else. Push aside any one who is in the way. It was a new pulsation, as a human heart speeds up its beats before an important decision.

Panting for breath, I passed through the gate of the Moscow Art Theater. In the distance I saw a familiar figure, slim, erect, hands in pockets. "The Inspector" was crossing the courtyard with the springy walk of a rooster. Nobody knew his age, seventy-five or forty-five. People said he had

not changed in twenty-five years. A retired Colonel of the Russian Frontier Cavalry, he was now superintendent of the Theater. His hobby was the Law and the Code of the Russian Empire. Behind his back we used to make fun of him. There was the story of the hold-up. Maybe it was true. One night after a performance the Inspector was working late in his office. Two thugs entered. They pointed weapons. "Come on. Quick! Hand over the money!" The Inspector looked at them, looked at the weapons, got up, leaned across his desk.

"It is my duty to inform you gentlemen," he said precisely, in his high-pitched sharp voice, "that your entry and request are unlawful. It is explicitly explained by Paragraph 77, Chapter 15, Book 6 of the Penal Code of the Laws and Bylaws of the Russian Empire." He raised his voice, "Stepan! Clear the office, please!"

The door behind the thugs opened and the huge, fat night watchman, half asleep, but pretending to be wide awake, entered the office, booming out the first thing that came into his mind, "No more free tickets, gents!" He opened the street door and with his three hundred pounds pushed the startled "gents" out.

The Inspector raised his voice once more. "Stepan! Your remark about the tickets was inappropriate to the occasion. First: Always think before you speak. Second: Your livelihood will be in danger if I am interrupted again while at work. Third: Investigate and report in writing the method of entry of two strangers with every door locked. Dismissed."

I stood in front of him looking into his small stern face with its bushy eyebrows and mustache. "How do you do, Colonel."

He shook my hand. "How do you do. Were your efforts in the service of His Majesty successful?"

"I hope so, Colonel."

"I congratulate you."

"Thank you. How are you yourself, Colonel? How is your family?"

"Thank you. My wife is in good health. My two sons gave their lives for the Emperor and the country." This was said as if he were speaking of strangers. I looked at him not knowing what to say. He continued, "It would not have been necessary as things stand to-day." He cleared his throat and looked at his watch, a large, thick gold affair engraved with the eagle of the Russian Empire. "The meeting is at ten. You are three minutes late." Then he extended his hand to me. "Welcome," and walked away.

I followed him with my eyes. He disappeared through the door to his office. Ten years ago I had entered that door for the first time. Above it was a small electric bulb. For some technical reason it was always burning day and night. Maxim Gorki said about it once, "This tiny light brightens every theater in the whole world. . . ." I looked for it. It was still burning. I felt as if I were an exhausted and lost traveler, who after an aimless and perilous voyage, suddenly sees a glowing candle-light in the window of his home.

When I was admitted to the Moscow Art Theater I was eighteen years old. It was difficult to get in, and had been since the beginning in 1900. Each year hundreds of applicants faced three examinations before three different boards. Only two or three of those who applied were taken, and then on probation. Naturally, when I passed all this and was one of the three in the year 1907, I felt exalted. Yet I knew that I still had to go through a rigid apprenticeship and that if I was unfit I would be chopped off like a dead branch.

I became part of a young group. We considered ourselves "chosen" children of the best theater in the Empire, and probably in the world. We were called amateurs by other theaters and were proud of it. Later I found the same esprit de corps among the lancers. It was a collective pride, a "patriotism of institution," an adoration of "colors."

The Moscow Art Theater was (and still is) called the House of Unruly Dissenters. It has never grown self-satisfied, it has never settled down. But it managed to make two hundred per cent. profit and sold tickets a year in advance.

Its members were given education and ideals, and a livelihood to the end of their professional lives. If they had enough talent, they became co-proprietors. It resembled, indeed, a Masonic order, of the time when Masonry was a close brotherhood.

When the actors died they were buried one next to the other in the cemetery of the New Virgin's Nunnery on the banks of the Moscow River. An unusual thing for a theater—to take care of its dead. The Moscow Art Theater did it with love, with tender sorrow and a bit of theatrical sentimentality.

Once within the Theater our whole lives were changed. We spent our days from morning until midnight without leaving the building. There was nothing bohemian about our existence. Both men and women were taught to dress simply, in dark colors, almost monastic, to wear our hair smooth and short; to behave inconspicuously and with courtesy and elegance. We were encouraged to resemble scholars rather than actors. And we worked and studied hard enough to make the resemblance easy.

In the beginning I got about twelve dollars a month. I was assigned to various classes to learn the art of the actor and I was warned that if in a year I had not rid myself

of my Polish accent I would be dismissed. After that I was left alone by directors and teachers. Entirely, as if I did not exist. That was the way of the Theater, to find out if I had enough stamina and brain to become a part of the organization by myself.

It was a hard schooling for a boy. I was eager to meet outstanding people, the heroes of my young imagination. There were two demigods whom we idolized, Stanislavsky and Dantchenko. These were the living gods, whose kindness was more terrifying than anger, and whose anger one never saw. Stanislavsky was the soul of the Theater, Dantchenko its mind. We adored Stanislavsky, a white-haired giant, spectacular in life as on the stage. He was the fiery leader whom we imitated. Dantchenko, mild and unpretentious, appealed less to us when we were young. But as we grew older we came almost to worship him. He was quiet and seldom heard, rich in wisdom but with flaming visions; the arbiter of all our difficulties. Stanislavsky was a brilliant actor performing Prospero. Dantchenko was Prospero himself.

World-famous people passed through the greenroom at night or the spacious halls in the daytime. We saw Tolstoy, Gorki, Rachmaninof, Chaliapin, Salvini, Isadora Duncan, Gordon Craig, Alexander Benoit, Arthur Nikish, Roerich, Scriabin, Jaques Dalcroze and Grasso. Near them we must have looked like a bunch of fox terriers around a Great Dane carrying a bone to its kennel. I was eager to associate with them, just as children like to be with grown-ups. I suffered at not being able to join them closely in their work. But none of the novitiates could do so. We were kept aloof and were watched closely, without suspecting it. Sometimes our pride was deliberately hurt to find out if we could efface ourselves for the good of the work.

Once Sieroff was painting a portrait of Stanislavsky. I

stood with my mouth wide open staring at the great Sieroff until he found me in a straight line between him and his sitter. Grumpily he took the cigarette out of his mouth and said in a low voice, "Not every emptiness is transparent, young man."

We were often absurd. One member of the Theater was translating Oscar Wilde. We chipped in pennies and bought each volume as it appeared. After all had read it we drew lots to decide to whom it should belong.

For a while we were all esthetes. One day I appeared for rehearsal in a black starched shirt, collar and a black leather tie. I had dyed the shirt and collar with India ink and made the tie from a piece of patent leather. Mosckvin, one of the most talented of the older actors, took one look at me, "How are you this morning, young embalmer?"

Sometimes five of us would buy one ticket to a new opera or ballet. Each would see one act. The others would walk around the block in the snow or sleet. The rest of the night, we would exchange impressions.

We eagerly watched all the performances and studied all the "big parts" played by "big actors." There were always a dozen unofficial understudies. One boy was so ready to substitute for any part in the whole repertory that every night he greeted the doorman:

"Hello. Everybody in good health? Nobody died? All right. Some other time." And he rushed in to make up for his part in the crowd.

It was a peculiar sort of kindness they ruled us with. One season Stanislavsky was ill with typhoid. For no good reason I stayed away from singing classes. I received a short note from Dantchenko. "Will you be able to look Stanislavsky in the face when he recovers?" Ashamed, I missed no more classes.

One day one of the directors stopped me. "You walk like a drunken sailor," he said. "Why don't you learn some grace? Watch General Stachovitch. Imitate him."

Immediately I saw myself another Stachovitch . . . tall, erect, beautifully groomed, head charmingly bent forward, monocle in the right eye. Perhaps too, I saw myself, like him, a part owner and director. I bought a monocle, ribbon and all, and practised with it in front of the mirror until five in the morning. As a result, I was late for the first lesson . . . in Greek dancing. I rushed into my dancing garb, sandals, chlamys and all, stuck the monocle in my eye, wound the ribbon around my neck and nonchalantly entered the class. There was not much dancing that morning. As a Greek with a monocle I was too much for both class and teacher. I was ordered to report my behavior. Sadly I was walking down the stairs just as General Stachovitch was coming up. He stopped me and said crisply:

"Young man, it is rude to imitate an elderly person in fun, but it is an even graver offense to keep your mouth open while you're wearing a monocle. Good day."

A small restaurant belonging to the Theater served tea and coffee, cookies and sandwiches to the audience. For the older members of the troupe, there was always something nice and appetizing on a little gas stove. But for us, leftovers of ham or cheese or yesterday's stew warmed up under the fine name, Hungarian goulash. Sometimes we meekly protested. The motherly woman who leased the restaurant, and whom we called "Sweet Mother Cutthroat," always had the same answer: "Children, when I was your age, I could eat raw bones—and I did. Besides, you know it isn't good manners to make a fuss over your food." The words "good manners" at once made us ready to eat raw bones. But Mother Cutthroat did have French

pastries, large and substantial, at three coppers each. Two of them with a big glass of tea could sustain an iron stomach for half a day.

The big meal came after the performance, in a beer shop on the way home. There, twelve coppers bought a bottle of nourishing dark beer. With it you got free a trayful of knickknacks whose purpose was to incite thirst: pretzels, mushrooms, dried fish, herring roe, salted beans, apples and corn, each bedded in a layer of salt. The tray was free because a normal human being would take one bite from it and need a bottle of beer. But we managed to consume two trays of free food and to drink only one bottle each. When we went up and asked for a second tray, the proprietor, astounded by our resistance to thirst, would pass it over and wait for the order of beer. The tray would be cleaned up—the beer never ordered. The trick worked only once in each place. But there were so many beer shops in Old Moscow. At night we had a pailful of water and a cup at the bedside. In the morning the pail was empty.

A small group of us stuck together. Boris; Volodia; Paul; Michael, a tall and helpless man, poetic and talented, who never finished anything he began but who inspired everybody around to beauty and achievement; Shura, a youngster—almost a boy; and a young Jew, Gregor, with a wonderful voice. All night long we would listen to him singing to his own accompaniment on the guitar. We would listen and look into his strong face, red with wine and emotion. The girls were Vera, with her strange Greek-like poise; motherly Lyda; Ann, always laughing; Marutchka, trembling with excitement; Sima, who looked like a Dickensian spinster; and Hope Bromley, always powdering her nose.

What did we talk about in those days? We were never silent except on the stage or in classes. We talked about

the ideals of the actor. We disputed hotly about the origin of Rhythm, or the Coordination between the Mind and the Emotions, or Yogi culture applied to the Art of Acting. One whole night we spent arguing about old Lensky of the Imperial Theater, who had just died and whose last words on his death-bed were:

“O, I die, Horatio;
The potent poison quite o’er-crows my spirit.
I cannot live to hear the news from . . .
—The rest is silence.”

pronounced with the same Victorian pathos with which he used to interpret his parts. We pictured ourselves dying with the words of Shakespeare or Schiller on our lips. Had he been sincere or had he been pretending? Posing like an old-fashioned “histrion” or pouring out his last breath in the best way he knew?

Sima, her long hands crossed on her flat old-maidish bosom, voiced her opinion, “He was real and sincere. He really died. He could not have pretended. . . .”

Boris, as usual laconic and authoritative, stopped her, “I don’t believe it.”

“You don’t believe anything, Boris. You’re just a mechanism. I couldn’t fall in love with you if you were the last man in the world,” Sima retorted, hurt.

Gregor laughed, showing his shining even teeth, and plucked the strings of his guitar. He sang sotto voce:

“My dying word, beloved,
Will be thy holy name.
My dying gaze, adored,
Will be into thy heart. . . .”

Lyda, as always, taking care of us, filled all the glasses

with tea again. Volodia, clumsily upsetting his chair, shouted: "He had all his relatives around him, he just gave a last performance, that's all."

Michael ignored him. His tall figure dangling from the small chair, he kept on dreamily and with his usual affected accent, "And the hand of Death brought the curtain down. . . ."

Again Boris said quietly, "I don't believe it. He died of nephritis. He must have been in a coma for days."

Marutchka jumped up from her seat, "And you, Boris, you'll die of a frozen heart—you icicle!"

"Maybe, but I won't mouth poetry on my death-bed."

"I tell you he was sincere." Hope banged her powder case on the table and then, looking hastily to see if she had broken the mirror, dropped out of the argument.

"I tell you he was a fake. . . ." Boris calmly superior.

"One doesn't lie while dying," Volodia took up the argument.

"One lies always. To lie is to live."

"You think you are Nietzsche."

"My profession is to lie—I am an actor."

"Why don't you tell it to Stanislavsky?"

"Because he would lie and pretend that he didn't agree with me."

And so on till daylight when Gregor sang a new song—the only fleeting result of our talk.

"Life and death—life and death
My only two exquisite jewels.
The first I wear in Spring and Summer
In Autumn also and in Winter
Every night and every day.
The second I'll wear but once
Just once—just once
Before the dawn."

Another night Volodia was the pretext of a party—quite without meaning to be. We all loved him. He was the funniest and the clumsiest among us, a robust near-sighted youngster, all arms and legs, a comedian without effort. With blank eyes behind thick glasses, and a solemn face, his every word strove for a laugh.

In the first act of Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird*, a lot of us, dressed from head to foot in black velvet to make us invisible, were handling the furniture and props which, under the Fairy's magic wand, had to come to life. Chairs, tables, pails, pots, pictures—everything moved in precise rhythm while the orchestra played the *Symphony of Awakening*. Every object had its exact starting time in the music. Each movement had to be executed without conflicting with the others. Volodia had to handle two chairs, a grandfather's clock and a vessel conveniently kept under children's beds at night. He sailed successfully with his chairs and clock, took them on the beat, swayed to the right and left, up and down, and brought them back to their original place. He had only to pick up the chamber pot from under the bed and move it as if looking for a more cozy and private corner. The music slid into dainty variations of woods and bass violas. Volodia picked the thing up, made the first four measures, stumbled over my leg, turned over, but held fast. But none of this was in time with the music.

After the rehearsal came criticism. When the turn of the *Symphony of Awakening* came, all Stanislavsky could do was to exclaim, "But *le petit pot!* Horrible—terrible—not a sign of rhythm—not a sign of mystery or elegance or fairy-tale—nothing! Imperfection of detail ruins the structure of the whole. Is it so difficult to remember those six bars of music? Who handles *le petit pot?*"

Volodia got up, ashamed, and stammered, "I'm sorry. I practised with the darn thing all night long."

Stanislavsky was the first to explode into an outburst of laughter and we nicknamed Volodia at once and for ever, "Night-practise Volodia." But his little slip was an excuse to feast, sing and laugh all night long.

In my second year I was trusted with a big part—the Student in Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*. It was the leading part and the play was a Russian classic. All traces of my accent were gone. If a young actor had jumped ahead like that in another theater, his companions would have showered him with sickly congratulations and looked on him with an evil eye. But here my friends watched me like hawks and attended all the rehearsals. Afterward they pounced on each mispronounced word and on each slip in the portrayal. Scene by scene, they went over it with me.

"Don't you dare to fail," said Volodia, "or you'll make the whole gang of us look silly. I'll unscrew your legs if you don't make good."

I seriously nodded my head and answered in a whisper, saving my voice as if I were an opera singer: "I won't let you down . . . I won't."

During the performance they treated me as though I were a star. They surrounded me with solemn silence and would let no one disturb me.

The opening of *A Month in the Country* was my first young triumph. But it was also *our* triumph. All of us sat till dawn in a café and drank, proudly. Boris, next to me, spoke slowly, "Yes . . . that was fair. The problem is, will you be able to do the next part better?"

"We made good!" repeated Paul in a loud and haughty voice after each tumbler of vodka, and Michael drew a portrait of me in the part and tried to pay our bill with it. He argued with the proprietor, telling him that he was letting a priceless treasure escape his hands. Raising his large

eyes to the ceiling, he exclaimed: "A drawing by *me*, representing *him*—ten years and it will be worth one hundred thousand!" The proprietor shook his head politely. Little did he know. Ten years later I sold that drawing to the Commissioner of Fishery under the Communistic Régime, an artistic soul who gave me half a million rubles for it. Next day, for the half million I bought myself a pair of shoes.

At three o'clock we walked about ten miles to the new Virgin's Nunnery. The walk and morning air sobered us. At the cemetery we stood silent, reverently resting our foreheads on the cold wrought-iron fence of Chekhov's grave.

The eternal flame burned inside the small monument. The wall of the cemetery was low, and across quilts of flowers, we could see far away fields and the wooded hills of Sparrow Mountains, from which Napoleon looked on Moscow for the first time. On one side the lazy Moscow River moved slowly along, and on the other, tall white church towers with golden cupolas rose from a vast expanse of light gray houses and green roofs. When the weather was misty the churches looked like Hindu stylized flowers embroidered on milky felt.

The sun broke through the morning clouds as we walked back. At a coachman's tea-house we ate fresh hot rolls and butter and drank the most expensive fragrant Chinese tea. Immobile coachmen sat around us like bearded Buddhas, sipping the boiling liquid from their saucers. At nine o'clock we were back at work in the Theater.

I don't know whether we started this procedure or not, but it became a tradition with us. Chekhov remained with us as a living force and to him we went after each first night with our joy or our sorrow. We were taught to love him as if he were still among us. In the Theater, which is the kingdom of unreal things, the real ones are sometimes only shadows.

CHAPTER V

OUR STUDIO

THE main lobby of the Theater was packed with people. I could not have made my entrance at a better time. A meeting had been called for the whole institution. Everybody from the workshop boys and ushers up to Stanislavsky and Dantchenko was there. I was embraced, kissed, shaken, slapped on the back, turned around and punched.

Boris, fat and pale, in the uniform of a military clerk with the insignia removed, said slowly in his drawling nasal voice, "Well, here you are. . . . One more to feed." Everybody laughed. He treasured his emotions as secrets, and while he pretended indifference, could not let go my hand, which he kept patting with his chubby fingers. We had been admitted to the Theater on the same day. He was then an erudite reserved youngster two years older than I. I was more like an excited colt turned into a field on a spring morning. During the admission tests Boris had impressed every one by the taste and depth of his impromptu renditions. As for me, I plunged into the cheapest kind of melodrama with such a fury of sincerity that the whole assembly shouted with laughter. I gave the soliloquy of a young man despairing on the grave of his mother, who had been murdered by treachery. The laughter did not bother me. I went on in my far from perfect Russian, made up of a combination of south Russian and Polish brogue. When I finished, dripping with perspiration, red in the face, trembling with emotion, I was almost on top of the table of the faculty. They all looked at me with wide grins.

“Well,” I said, “how do you like it?”

Another explosion of laughter. One of the older actors on the faculty spoke at last, “But, my dear boy, your accent is preposterous—horrible.”

“It isn’t an accent,” I retorted, “it’s temperament.”

That finished everybody. I was dismissed and the next day came to learn my fate. Boris and I approached the board together. His name was there. Also that of Hope Bromley, a girl of English ancestry, born in Russia; and my own. We were the three new members of the Moscow Art Theater. It must have been “temperament” which carried me through.

After that Boris and I were inseparable. I learned everything I could from him. He said once, “To be a good actor one must qualify as follows: One: Be a sincere and accomplished idiot; Two: Have the looks, disposition and temperament of a stallion; Three: Acquire a friend and guide like myself. You’ll make the grade,” he finished indifferently. But he watched over me and made me study, read and think.

To-day at the meeting he alone was calm, as usual. He stood with all my other younger friends in a close group at one corner of the vestibule.

“What’s the meeting about?” I asked, after the noise of greetings had died down. “Looks like something special—everybody’s here.”

“Don’t you know anything?” some one asked.

“How should I? I just got in yesterday.”

Twenty excited voices began at once. Young eyes burned, tired pale faces flushed, impetuous sentences flew from all sides into a coherent idea.

“We want to break away from the Theater. We need more freedom. Our Studio ought to choose our own plays, and produce them in our own way. . . . Why must we

always stick to realism? To be the tail to anybody's kite? The Theater with its authority is choking us. They don't recognize modern movements in Art . . ."

Volodia, as usual, could not resist a joke. "And even the food we get is what's left over. Nothing but herrings—morning, noon and night—herrings! Why can't we manage our own cooperative?"

Even tolerant Sima raised her voice. "They are old—kind but old."

Marutchka, tiny and exploding, was the loudest of all. Like a little sparrow, she jumped around me. "In their day they were revolutionists—why shouldn't we be? Artistic slavery! We want to be independent! We want to break away."

So that was it! The Studio, child of the Moscow Art Theater, was rebelling against its parent. I was stunned.

Three years before the war, in a humble enough spirit, Boris and I got a notion that we would like to have a show of our own. If we could take it to the suburban theaters we would make some extra money. But we were not allowed to play except in the Theater itself. How to get around this? Perhaps if we showed our elders a carefully prepared play, they would let us perform it in the suburbs of Moscow, in clubs and workers' theaters. We chose a Dutch melodrama. We rehearsed, designed and mounted it entirely by ourselves. The day approached when we were to show our efforts to the assembly of the Moscow Art Theater and we were scared, for we were going to play before accomplished masters.

The nearer the showing the worse things got. Only three hours before the curtain the actor who was to play the most important part, that of an old, cruel sea-captain, sent a message. His three-year-old daughter had died—his wife was in a state of collapse—he could not come. At the end of

the note he added: "After all, it is not a show for the public."

My heart sank. There was no one who could understudy. It was too late to put off the performance. All our hopes lay in pieces. Volodia, Boris and I sat in a sad bunch, too bitter to speak. We never quite forgave that actor. He could not forgive himself. A few years ago he died in Chicago. His last work with his pupils was that same wretched old Dutch melodrama which he deserted at the time of its birth.

After an hour of desperation, Boris said, "Richard, read the part from the book. Put on full make-up and costume and read it."

As director, I knew more about the part than any one else; I knew the stage business and would not upset the others. But it was my first effort as a director, and my knees shook too.

"Naturally," added Boris encouragingly, "you will be very bad as an old man, but there is nothing else to do."

Until then I had played only juvenile parts. This would be my first attempt at a character part, without a rehearsal, and before the greatest assembly of character actors ever gathered in one room. There was no choice. I had to do it.

"Let's go," I said to the actors. "Where's the costume?"

They helped me cover myself with the largest white beard that I could find and I plunged into Dutch villainy. So we went on, trembling.

Our reception rose high above our hopes. The whole assembly applauded us, they praised us and they laughed at us good-naturedly. We had used all our ingenuity to make Dutch fishermen out of scraps of make-up and costumes from the Theater's discontinued plays. They recognized "Brand's" boots and the shawl of "Fru Rosmer." They smiled at the table from a Tolstoy play and a chair from

one of Maeterlinck's. The next day they gave us ten thousand rubles and blessed us on our venture. We were told to hire a place of our own. It should be called The Studio of the Moscow Art Theater, and would make a good practical school for us. But they kept their eyes on us steadily and we always felt the iron hand of their authority. We cherished our Studio and worked in it, frantically, expressing ourselves freely in our own way. We had to work in two places at once, in the Theater and in the Studio. Often we rehearsed nights.

In time the Studio became self-supporting. It was truly communistic. All the money taken in was divided and on their free nights the actors were ushers and stage hands.

To us the Studio had been a way of expressing ourselves. To the older members of the Theater it seemed a good safety-valve for young enthusiasts. They had been indulgent, but they had ruled us. Now the Studio was for cutting away the apron strings.

It was startling. But in the flash of a second I linked myself with my own group. In the army I had been White. Here in the Theater, in the realm of art, I instantly became Red, the most insubordinate and unruly Red of them all. I could not help it. It was in the air. No living being could escape a somersaulting of values in those days. In the army it was political and sociological, in the Theater it was artistic. Revolt against authority. Fight for self-determination. It was not a bloody revolt as in the army—nor the brutal, physical support of an idealistic doctrine as in the revolution. No, we fought our fight with scholarly arguments. Words flew back and forth, bit, stung, lashed. Respect remained in form, but in reality only its shadow was present. Against the old troupers who had generously made possible our Studio we now rebelled like so many young fools—or wise men? It was as though a group of conse-

crated monks rebelled against a conclave of bishops. I took part in the insurrection with gusto. I plunged into the argument, made a speech and won the applause of my friends. Stanislavsky shook his head: "Still fermenting . . . still fermenting, my boy." He was kind and sad. But he gave in. We demanded artistic freedom and we won.

The Studio of the Moscow Art Theater became independent. A few months before, our elders would have thrown us out of the Theater in disgrace. But to-day they looked at us in silent dismay. We pictured ourselves as marching abreast with the revolution. Everything that was old must be cast aside. Only afterward did I realize that in the Theater I had taken part in something for which in the regiment the penalty was death.

The Theater gave its performance that night as usual. Afterward we went to the Theater hospital, started during the war for soldiers, where some of us were on night duty. Every one looked worn out. Valka's pale face, Michael's sunken cheeks, Marutchka's unrest, Gregor's worried whistling—even Boris had black circles under his eyes. But I was filled with warmth and joy at the new horizon opening before us. Even the news about the comrades who were dead could not spoil my inner excitement, because at last I was at home. Not Poland, not Russia, not the regiment, not Moscow—the Studio seemed to me really home.

We talked now in hushed voices. All night long we sat huddled together, in a small room—hating to part. Now and then one tiptoed out and brought back a fresh pot of tea. I told them what I had seen on my way back from the front, of my futile war experiences. How the army had collapsed after Kerensky's famous Order Number One. I told them how the Council of Peasants and Workers and Soldiers had broken up the old Imperial Army, and how my Polish

regiment had to disband—of my long flight to Moscow, and how I had hidden in ravines and forests.

And they told me how things stood in the city. Here also the Temporary (Kerensky) Government was losing control. Instead of governing, it was arguing with the Communist Councils. The Councils did the actual ruling. But no one understood what it really was about. The Kerensky Government, afraid of bloodshed, tried to pacify the Councils with compromises. The Councils knew the time for talk was over. They mobilized each armed man whom they had lured from the front by the promise of peace.

The newspapers, all extreme, attacked each other with vicious force,—the moderate center had disappeared in war, collapse, bankruptcy. The public shrank back and looked on. Civil war, like a horrid disease, began to cover the land with blotches. Police and army officers suffered first.

The Reds seemed sure of themselves and their actions. They were close to their leaders, long trained in the organization of under-cover forces. For many years they had worked under iron discipline with only one penalty for any offense against the Communist Party—the penalty of death. No vagueness there. Their ideals, right or wrong, were clear and precise; their ways ruthless and brutal. They admitted no compromise.

"All these commissions and subcommissions and committees of Kerensky's," said Boris, shrugging, "to the Reds they're just hot air." Then he added, "Never mind, we have our Studio to stand by. Let's go about it the best way we can, whatever happens."

So our reunion was tense and filled with premonition. I plunged into my old world, one which I had almost forgotten during the war days. In a few hours I found myself again entirely in its grip. Two different worlds, as opposite as the poles and as extreme in aims.

Late at night, again on tiptoe, we went around the building, my friends showing me the changes and improvements made while I was away.

The quarters of the Studio were in Chaliapin's former apartment. The house was an old one—a mansion built around 1820—on Governor's Square. It was a palace of three stories with enormous rooms, which had been rebuilt into a theater. At first it seated one hundred people, now it seated three hundred and thirty. It had its own workshop, dressing-rooms, dining hall and lobby. In the attic were several small rooms in which a few of us lived.

The house occupied almost the whole of one side of Governor's Square. On the other side of the square were an old police station and a fire station with a small tower. In this a fireman stood day and night, supposedly looking for fires and smoke. But he could not see anything. All the houses were at least a story higher than the tower itself. But through custom, there he stood—a fireman on a tower two stories tall, looking into the windows of the Hotel Dresden, a gloomy six-story hotel, conservative and expensive.

To the right was the building which was to be the center of our nervous interest for thirteen days to come. This was the Governor's Palace. It looked so peaceful, standing in dignity, salmon-pink in color, behind it a walled-in garden. A balcony ran almost the whole width of the house, in its center a flag-pole and the black eagle crest of the Russian Empire.

From our small rooms in the attic we could look straight into the windows of the Governor's Palace. Soon these attic rooms of ours were crowded. In the beginning of the Council's reign, the distant streets where some of us lived were not safe to walk in alone late at night and so more and more of the Studio people came to live in the attic rooms. I was

one of them. I arranged a small cubbyhole for myself. Paul and Michael lived together in a room next to mine. Vera and Lyda in the next two rooms.

In a week I was performing every night. I took over my old parts from those who had acted them while I was away. I began to work on new productions for the Studio with greedy exaltation. I seldom went home to my apartment.

I found it hard to face my friend and orderly, Watzek. I felt like the traitor who has changed his colors. I had deserted my regiment and entered the service of the Theater. One can not serve two gods at once. Often after the performance I would wander alone in the dark lobby of the Studio trying to balance my conscience. I would stand for hours gazing through the window-panes into the Governor's Palace.

Once when I came down late at night I found Vera sitting on the window-sill and looking dreamily into the row of brightly lighted windows. Her head was resting on the frame of the window-pane. Her hands were embracing her knees. When I approached she looked at me.

"Restless?" she asked.

"Sort of—what are you doing here? Talking to the moon?"

She laughed. She was the only person I ever knew who could laugh softly and low, yet with all the vitality and vigor of an outburst. There was something of the child in her, or a singing bird. Under her cold statuesque beauty was a kind and serene soul. Soft and soothing, her presence alone had a calming effect. She seldom spoke. When she did, it was in a gentle slow manner. On the stage she was ecstatic and inspired, and her voice sounded like an organ. Many times I have heard her topping the screams and shouts of twenty extras in the mob scenes. She seemed quite

unconscious of her strong and beautiful body. Isadora Duncan called her "my fragrant girl from Sparta." Vera used to blush and look silently at Isadora with large blue eyes.

She put her hand on mine. "Look. . . ." I followed her gaze across the darkness of the square and, through the large windows, I saw an enormous formal ballroom; white and gold with red plush chairs along the wall and a row of portraits of old generals and emperors above them.

Three professional floor polishers, in white shirts, with large wax-brushes tied to their bare feet, danced vigorously on the shiny hardwood floor, giving it a weekly polish. They looked like skaters dancing on the ice. Bent, with swiftly moving legs, they dipped their heads to wipe the perspiration from their faces on the white towels hanging over their shoulders. Two of them worked hard and steadily; the third, the youngest, with lazy uneven strides.

"Like puppets in a children's theater," whispered Vera.

We watched them for a while. They stopped to rest under the huge portrait of the Emperor, talking to one another. Not hearing their words, we followed the short movements of their hands and the turn of their heads. The tall lazy young one was arguing with the others. He leaned over them, shook his head, pointed to the portrait, waved his arms and pounded the air with his fist. The eldest one, almost motionless, spoke, holding his face close to the ear of the tall one, as if he were arguing in a whisper. Suddenly he stamped his feet and slapped the young one across the face with the towel he held in his hand. The young one grinned and bent double in mockery. Still bent, with one movement, he jumped, barefoot, on to the red plush chair, faced the Emperor's portrait and spat on it. Once. Twice. Three times. After each time he turned to the old man and stuck his tongue out. The old man raised his hands in horror, ran out of sight and the lights went out. The ballroom

was in darkness. Street lights and moonbeams shyly filled it.

We were silent for a while. At last I said, "The ghosts in that room will have something to talk about now."

"The ghosts are leaving it! . . . Look . . . running from it—look—look," Vera said tensely and in a hushed voice.

Automobile headlights from somewhere in a distant street threw their reflection into the darkened room, and their beams, sliced by the window-frames, floated across it like so many stately white shrouds, and disappeared into nowhere.

In a few days the Communists made the Governor's Palace their headquarters. The old, serene, dreamy emptiness of the mansion gave room to a hard fiery mob directing their battle of life and death, and stamping out with muddy boots all the ghosts and memories of ghosts. We watched them through those same window-panes.

CHAPTER VI

THE LONG NIGHT BEGINS

ON A certain October night in 1917, the Theater was crowded. The play, Knut Hamsun's *In the Claws of Life*. In the third act I had but few cues, though I had to remain on the stage. I sat on a large couch facing the audience.

The reflected lights of the stage fell only on the first row of the orchestra. The rest was in half darkness. One string of pale faces like so many huge beads hung in the air, attentive and desperate. Masks on a single mechanism, they smiled and frowned in unison. The first row, the most expensive seats, belonged to solid people, thoughtful and elderly. To-night they were shrunk, devitalized, absent. Secret minds behind the masks were on the fever which was tormenting the land.

During intermissions the telephones were besieged. Lobbies and corridors fumed with excitement. A man at a telephone would turn to the crowd and say in a hushed voice, "Fighting in Petrograd! Bloody fighting. . . . Government troops against the Councils." Another man would come in from the street white and breathless, but a little pompous with his news: "Navy has gone in with the Communists. . . . Cruiser *Aurora* going to bombard Petrograd. . . . Sailors turned the fortress at Cronstadt over to Lenin. . . . All the officers drowned."

The bell rang and the curtain went up for the last act. The audience obediently hurried back to its seats. Like automatons, like robots of the intellect, they sat and listened. We went on with the show.

During the fourth act Colonel Modl, Chief of the Moscow police, came back-stage and called up his office on our separate line. Actors crowded around the telephone booth. He spoke in monosyllables, he listened for a long time. We could not make out what he was saying, but his face was twitching and with his right hand he was pulling nervously at the white aiguillettes on his shoulders. Only once his voice came stifled through the walls of the booth. He shouted into the transmitter, his face red with fury. "Burn it. . . . Burn everything. . . . Burn it at once!" After which he rushed out and whispered to General Stachovitch, "Can I get a civilian suit here? Petrograd is in the hands of the Communists." Stachovitch took him to a dressing-room. Ten minutes later Modl appeared in an old workman's cap and a shabby overcoat belonging to a minor character in some play. The disguise was poor. The clothes, worn and humble and too small for him, merely drew the eye to his healthy fragrant face. You could see that its little beard and mustache had been groomed by the best barber in town. And shabby men have no such white and shining teeth. He was as incongruous as an English race-horse harnessed to a plow.

Our old tailor and dresser, Baldin, a plain peasant who was a friendly and honest little workman, came rushing out holding Modl's uniform.

"Your Excellency . . . Your Excellency . . . what shall we do with this?" Modl blew up. "Bitch it!" He released the safety catches on two automatics, stuck them in his pockets and went out, slamming the door behind him. The little tailor stood aghast, his round face all agape.

Stachovitch addressed him with elaborate graciousness, "My friend, I advise you to preserve this uniform. Tomorrow you may be appointed to wear it." Baldin, from his four feet ten, looked up at Stachovitch's six and two,

blinking his eyes. Such a splendid expensive blue uniform made of the best English goods to be thrown on the floor and stepped on! Nothing funny about that. Later he folded it carefully, hung it in the wardrobe and pinned a card to it on which he asked somebody to write: "Left by His Excellency Colonel Modl. The lining of the left armpit slightly damaged. Mothballs put in, October, 1917."

The fourth act continued. The spectators of the first row were still there, more ghostly than before. Through the long last act till the final curtain they sat like a row of condemned. The curtain rose three times while they applauded mechanically. They stood with a sort of reverence, as at a mourning service, until a voice shouted from the gallery: "All power to the Councils!" Nobody turned around. Nobody looked up. No one picked up the shout and no one objected to it. As if hit over the head by a stick, the spectators shrank still more. But the applause stopped. The curtain went down for the last time in silence. We all hurried to take off our make-up.

In spite of my hurry, I was the last to leave the Theater. For the first time in several days I decided to go home; it was a long walk. The light in the street lanterns was burning half-way down. The street was empty. "How quickly that houseful of people dispersed," I thought. After the warm dressing-room, the wind was cold, and the freezing mist cut through my clothes. Far away I heard faint shots. At first they did not impinge on my consciousness as anything unusual. The sounds of war were still subconsciously with me, and the shooting sounded natural. But before I had walked a block the loud impatient chopping of a machine-gun made me stop. The familiar drilling blare acted on my nerves like the screech of a file on glass. I felt my teeth gritting. I stood at a corner of the long street and looked around in desperation. The machine-gun rattle was coming

from the Kremlin. I wanted to talk to somebody, but there was no one near me.

I began to move toward the sound. I can not explain why. As a civilian, I should have moved away from it. But I did not. At the first summons of the "war cricket," the army man in me picked up his call and went ahead without reasoning or aim, like a bird lured by a decoy whistle. I twisted my hands, I was alone, unarmed. I could not concentrate or figure out what I should do. The wind banged the sign of an English tailor from whom I used to order my clothes. The familiar letters caught my eye. "The last thing I got from him," I thought, "was a tail-coat. I wonder where it is now?" I stopped and thought about that stupidly for a long while. The machine-gun became silent. The sign banged harder, as if angry. I looked straight into a dimmed street-lamp, hypnotized by it. Suddenly, slowly, it began to darken. It darkened, flickered once, and as if with a sigh, went out. The sky was deep blue-black, and moonless above the night-filled street. All the houses were rigid without shadows or lighted windows. Not solid houses at all, but mere outlines. Covered with a shiny coating of frozen mist, they looked like gigantic black glass coffins standing upright.

Again I started on my way. The pavement was slippery and tiny particles of ice bit my face. Suddenly I felt afraid to walk close to the houses and moved to the middle of the street. Here the cobbles were even more icy, the wind more maddening. It threw itself from one side of the street to the other and on its way whirled in all directions dozens of small nasty eddies, shivering with mist. Still, it was comforting to be separated from the silent, dead stone walls.

I continued to move, slowly, like a dog on a scent, until I heard long shouts in the distance; far off and triumphant. As if to support them, several machine-guns knocked at once,

and the wind blew with a howl, banging and knocking down everything that stood in its way. A big explosion in the direction of the Kremlin shook the earth. I heard the windows shudder and twang. Candle-lights appeared in a few of them and shadows of half-dressed people swayed to the left and right, trying to see what had happened. They soon gave up and disappeared. Again there was not a soul in sight. That solitude, that separation from everything alive in the midst of a city of a million people, was so terrifying, so incoherently sinister, that I started to run like a horse gone crazy, right in the middle of the street, almost in darkness, stumbling and twisting my ankles on the slippery cobblestones. I ran toward the Kremlin. I did not care what unknown danger was there. I did not care how far it was. The only thing I craved was to race away from that crouching emptiness, so ready to swallow me. Fear, verging on insanity, was winding itself around me with slippery misty tongues. It pushed, pulled, jerked me, and at every windy cross-street slid over my skin and covered it with cold trembling.

I passed one block, two, three. A shout unwound itself from somewhere and struck me in the back of the neck.

"Halt!"

I slowed up a little. A shot whipped the emptiness. I stopped. A calm loud voice from the dark:

"Hands up! Turn around!"

I did so. Silence.

"Where are you going?"

"Home."

"Who are you?"

"An actor."

Silence.

"Come closer."

I went toward the voice. I could not see anybody. About

five steps from the wall of the house I stopped. From under my legs rose another voice:

"Why did you run, comrade?" I looked down. Three basement windows in an area held four people each. I could scarcely distinguish them. Their rifles lay on the ground, but one with a long gleaming bayonet was pointed at me. I tried hard to see their faces, but all I could make out clearly were the infantry sheepskin caps.

Again the soldier with the threatening rifle spoke, "Why were you running?"

"I wanted to find out what's going on in the Kremlin."

Silence again. I stood with my hands raised. Saliva filled my mouth so that I had to keep swallowing. A soldier climbed out of the area, came up to me till his bayonet almost touched my chest. He waited while another soldier went through my clothes and pockets, searching for arms.

"Nothing, he's clean," he announced. "Lower your hands, comrade."

Again I heard the first voice that had stopped me: "What theater you with?"

"Moscow Art."

"Move under the wall. We've got to keep the street empty."

I went into a space between two windows and leaned against the wall. The man below me pulled my trousers leg and asked me to sit down on the pavement. When I did so I saw that he wore an officer's cap with the cockade removed. He lifted his face and suddenly laughed in a hushed voice:

"I nearly signed you off. You shouldn't have run, comrade. We can't take chances. Would have been too bad though. I love your Theater. What's your name?"

I told him.

He laughed again. "Oh, I know you—the Student in *A Month in the Country*."

I said: "Yes."

He continued, "Turgenev. I know. Beautiful and useless. Bourgeois sentimentality, but you were fine in it. Very fine."

"What's going on?" I was recovering a little.

"Nothing yet. Plenty soon," came the quick response, and again a chuckle. "I don't think you'll have much to do in the Theater for the next couple of days. We're going to blast the earth and heavens to pieces."

He whistled a tune, then abruptly, "What are your political beliefs, comrade?"

"I have none," I said. "We're so busy with our work in the Theater that we never care much about political orientations. Why do you ask?"

"Because,—let me give you some friendly advice," he answered. "You'll have to belong to one side or the other from now on. Either to the Whites or to the Reds. Either to the weak, meddling, gabbling bourgeoisie or to the Council of the Workers. There's no middle way. Petrograd's in the hands of the Councils—Jaroslav, Cronstadt, Bologoe. To-morrow it will be Moscow. We've started to clean up this country. And we mean it. Get this straight. We don't fight. What we do is to clear parasites off the surface of the earth. We exterminate them. And on that job, comrade, there's no place for spectators. Either take a broom or be swept. It's a hard job. Dirty job. Disgusting. Like trampling rats. Just the same it'll have to be done."

"Aren't you afraid you'll murder your own people?" I interrupted.

"Oh, comrade," he was suddenly impatient, "stop that intellectual whining. Regular White-Hand sentimentality. If your brother had rabies would you talk to him or shoot him?"

"How do you know he has rabies?" I said quickly.

"If he hasn't, then I have them. And he can shoot me—I'm ready. We can't both go on. We bother each other. We're a danger to each other. Didn't we commit thousands of murders during the war? Didn't we murder our brothers there?"

I started to say something.

"Wait, wait, don't argue with me." He cut me off. "I'm sick of words. Forget politics, speeches, resolutions. To hell with them. Did we or did we not murder human beings like ourselves? We did." He slapped the stone with the palm of his hand and hurried on. "Now—to-day—we're a thousand times better justified than we were then. In the Great War we didn't understand what the other side was after. We simply were told a lot of lies. But here now we do understand the other side—oh, we understand them very well. We're justified in fighting them, we're justified in exterminating them." He was worked up and was breathing heavily.

The rest of the soldiers were silent. "Are you an officer?" I asked.

"War-time lieutenant. Peasant's son. And you?"

"I'm a Pole," I evaded the issue.

"It doesn't matter. Do you feel like one of the people or one of the ruling classes?"

"I feel like one of my own people," I said slowly.

At this moment some one in the first window whispered sharply: "Shut up!" The peasant-lieutenant turned his head away from me and shifted his rifle in the direction from which I had come. So did the rest of the soldiers. I wanted to get up. "Lie down," hissed one of them, and hit me across the legs with a bayonet. I flattened myself on the pavement. Five people appeared from the side-street. Four of them had rifles. They were walking fast in single file toward the Kremlin. When they were about twenty yards

away the lieutenant shouted: "Halt! Who goes there?" The five men stopped. Four of them fell to the pavement. The fifth hid himself in a doorway.

"I'll shoot! Who's there?" yelled the lieutenant as if forcing himself to shout.

The man who was hidden in the doorway answered: "For Liberty and Equality."

The lieutenant, without a second's hesitation, threw back the answer: "All power to the Councils. Fire!"

Twelve rifles spat in the direction of the reclining men. The echo drummed taps on every stone and window around. Sparks of bullets flickered on granite cobblestones. One voice sang a long painful "Ah-ah-ah." Another hissed angrily: "Scum! . . . Scum!"

The man behind the door had begun to shoot, but his shots were landing high above us. I laid my head on the cold stone, like a worm that wants to dig itself into the ground and can not pierce it. Bullets clapped into the wall. Chips of plaster fell all over me. Two of the Whites lying on the ground emptied their rifles as fast as they could. Before they could hit any one, the lieutenant's voice again: "Fire!" And the last two men were silenced. Not a sound out of them.

The only White still shooting was the man behind the door. He had two guns. One of them was empty. A second of silence while he snatched out the other and fired six times. One after another. The soldiers ducked into the window-shafts. A pause. A whisper: "Quick, he's re-loading!" A man sprang out of the area and ran along the wall until he was opposite the doorway, then fired straight into the door. Three shots answered him. The soldier fell on his knee and shot once again. Again three revolver shots answered. They fought with almost musical precision; a loud deep bang. Then fast and screaming—bang-bang-

bang. Again in a low tone—bang. And again in a higher pitch—bang-bang-bang. In the darkness the men could not see each other. I felt a soldier next to me climbing out of the shaft. He crossed the street and started to sneak along the opposite wall. He held his rifle ready. When he came near the four silenced men lying on the pavement, one of them tried to rise and, crawling, howled in a drawling painful voice: "Your honor, your honor—there is one stealing along the . . ." and did not finish. The soldier shot him before the ring of his voice died out. He slumped to the ground. Across the street a light appeared behind two windows. In the darkness its ray fell on the area. The soldiers all cursed loud and brutally. Almost every one of them fired into the lighted windows. The glass broke and fell with a loud ring. A woman's voice inside the apartment screamed a long hollow note. The lights went out. The man behind the door grabbed this moment to run out. Like a shadow he raced back the way he had come. The soldiers fired after him, but he faded into the darkness and disappeared.

The lieutenant climbed out of the area. All the soldiers followed him and ran toward the four immobile forms. They bent over each body. Two single shots finished those who showed signs of life. I got up. The lieutenant came back and said quietly: "Police." He lighted a cigarette. By the light of the match I saw his face for the first time. It was calm, with a young Christ-like beard which gave him a rather kind expression. He held the match with a steady hand and gave me a cigarette.

"I think you'd better go home, comrade," he said. "The safest way will be to go from one of our posts to another. Just say who you are. But don't run away, and don't go near the Kremlin."

He took the cigarette out of his mouth. "After everything is over we'll need actors," he added with a smile.

CHAPTER VII

SHAME

THE peasant-lieutenant gave me a last bit of advice before I left. "The next post's in the old market in Hunter's Row." He chuckled. "If they challenge you, answer anything you want but 'Freedom and Equality.' That's Whites' gabble. You'd be signed off before you could get it out. Good night, comrade!"

I answered. "Good night, comrade!" and started down the street. I felt ashamed. A pungent sticky feeling. "Traitor," I thought. "Why didn't you call him 'citizen' and show yourself the Democrat that you think you are?" My ears began to burn, and shortly my whole body flared with heat, flushed with pounding blood.

I was alone and unarmed between two deadly fighting camps. I could make no slightest difference in the outcome of the struggle. Like an animal between two spreading fires on the prairie I was lost in the rackets of disaster which sprang and whirled around me. I did not feel attached to either of the camps. I did not want to belong. I felt a stranger to these human beings driven by the inhuman force of their convictions. I had no convictions in this struggle. But I was not in one piece. The civil war repelled me, but it lured me too. The part of me which was a friend to Russia was tempted to take a side. The Pole rejected any participation in Russia's affairs. Between two truths, between two lies, I wandered in torment.

Step after step down the empty street, twisting my heart. What did I really feel? Surely I was gorging myself in-

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satiablely on one poisonous emotion, that expressed by "I have come home." That feeling alone was true. That was the only dominant thought in me at that time. I could die for it. Nothing else. Outside of it—emptiness. Nothing mattered and nothing could bother me. I had not even any clear idea about where my real home was. I had simply collapsed into the notion of it. I was sick, war-sick. A sick man does not choose a bed to collapse into. He drops into the first one he comes across. He lies in it motionless and does not want to be disturbed. His eyes are closed to the world. His body is torpid. His brain and soul give life only to the reflections of emotions, only to the echoes of former passions. When those echoes grow to the point where they seem real, he becomes delirious. I was on the verge of delirium. The echoes of former days began to rise in me. I began to realize, to look for, to touch the dreaming feelings, the traces of old ties and allegiances. They trembled somewhere deep inside me.

Do I have to cling to them or can I forget about them? I'm alone; I have no obligations, no promises to fulfil. Except for self-preservation. And to my inner ego. My inner ego. What is it? Pride? Loyalty? Faith? Conscience? Blood? Atavism? Habit? Why does it bother me? I shook my head to clear up the thoughts. I swung it around a few times to make the blood circulate. I needed strength and sureness in thinking.

Slowly thoughts began to materialize. After one has been attached for a long time to a collective body, to a group of one's own kind, regiment, society, country,—and after one submits to its judgments, its rules and its orders, it is hard to renounce that allegiance, to change one's code. It is hard to set up new values, new loyalties. Especially if one is left in solitude and has to rely solely on one's own judgment. Heroes can do it, geniuses and hermits, but average human

beings? A human being like myself thrown into solitude while in the midst of a million brooding souls? Thrown into a cataclysm where the whole world has disappeared and the new one is not yet born? Poland—Russia. Regiment—Theater. Order—Anarchy. Murder—Self-preservation. They all were around me or inside me, but there was no herd of other human beings to drag me along with them and tell me what to choose and what to reject. I was not in one piece. I did not know where I stood.

"But aren't you a Pole?" I said to myself suddenly in startled shame. "Aren't you still in the service of Poland? Can you forget that? Yes—but who's bothering about Poland here? Nobody's fighting Poland. That lieutenant shot four policemen, but when you said you were a Pole, what did he care? It meant nothing to him. No use bringing Poland up now." And I felt robbed of my dearest possession. "No." I caught myself. "There is one thing I ought to stick to. That is 'Freedom and Equality.' That's the slogan I learned as a child. It was great—universal. Above anything. Like real Christianity, it was all-embracing. I don't need to belong to any herd or camp to stand by those two immortal words. But what do they mean?" I began asking myself with each step of my feet: "Whose Freedom? Whose Equality? Whose Freedom? Whose . . ." I stopped abruptly. "No, all that's just words—words to force me into some party. I don't want to submit myself to any group, to any organization. For the first time in my life I'm alone—alone and lost. I shall not shy from it. I want to be left alone until I find myself." Again my feet stepped the word—"Alone . . . alone . . . alone . . ." The rhythm of walking to the same word plunged me into a kind of twilight vigilance. I could feel my senses vibrating like the wings of a humming-bird. They became so sharp that each new impression hurt with physical

pain. The touch of the mist and wind was unbearable. Thousands of sharp needles bit into my skin. The black houses covered with shining sleet stabbed my eyes. The icicles melting on my dry lips tasted sweet and sickish, like frozen blood.

I began to hear voices within me. They sounded like strange songs, all different, hummed together by ghost voices buried deep below the surface of the earth. Out of all rose one that twisted my nerves with one battering question. "Will you shout 'All power to the Councils . . . All power to the Councils . . . All power to the Councils' . . .?" It must have been some kind of devil inside of me who was asking this. He wanted to laugh—a grim laughter. I shook my head and started to walk faster, trying to escape an answer. I could not answer. Shall I shout "All power to the Councils"? Shall I? The devil burst out laughing, almost out loud. Another voice began to buzz, throbbing and hissing. A snake's tongue. Or a stage Jesuit. But it did not laugh. It tempted, slowly and softly: "Suppose you should be pinned to a wall by six steady steel bayonets ready to sink into your guts; wouldn't you say 'All power to the Councils'? Oh! just say it—you wouldn't have to mean it. Of course you would. You're alone. That gives you an excuse. Later you can always excuse yourself by saying, 'Hell, I was alone—what could I do?'" The voice sighed and continued to purr something unintelligible. I heard my heel strike the stones and my lips drop the words one at a time: "Hell . . . I'm alone . . . what could I do?" Then carefully with the stroke of the heel of the other shoe, I began: "All . . . power . . . to the . . ." I almost roared insanely at myself: "Shut up, shut up, you worm!" The horny imp in my heart burst into silent screaming and started to dance, belching chuckles and beating a tattoo on the pavement. I began to breathe fast. I sweated. I

wanted to stop. I caught the wall. I found that I was actually running and dancing and laughing.

I dug my fingers into the iron railing of the grill. I leaned against the frozen stones till I calmed down. It took some time. Then I looked around. Four blocks up the street was the place where the four policemen had been killed. Ahead, and in back of me, hundreds of unborn murders were clamoring and clattering as if begging to be allowed to plunge into soft flesh, throw it on the ground and spread it over the streets in red blotches.

I had no part in it. I was looking on. I was right in the first row of seats. A guest at a unique gala performance of the most unexpected show on earth. A wandering tourist at the presentation of the Grand Guignol of the Universe. Presently I was listening to the orchestra of bullets, death rattles, rapturous words, lashed stones, and winds turned loose on the city. This very minute I was listening to the chorus of the thundering mob roaring in the distance. Between all this and myself emptiness and darkness. The whirlpool was outside of me.

I came to myself in a state of physical and spiritual equilibrium. With the whirlwind changes of delirium, I was suddenly happy. Shamefully happy. Like a clam safely in a shell, while the equinoctial tempest rages and tears the world to pieces. I chewed on my neutrality like a glutton. I was in a shell. I was a guest at the show. I would remain one. I would stay at the show and look on and see everything but never leave my seat. "Hold on to that. Hold fast—there it goes," I whispered into the darkness ahead of me whence a volley of shots burst out wildly. Their clatter rose and became almost hysterical, as so many angry words change into hysterical screaming. I felt an exuberant joy racing through my whole being. I almost shouted in unison with the distant banging: "Some one else

is making this war! Some one else! I don't have to shoot—hide—squirm while hot lead goes through me—yell 'Mummy' and look at my brains spilled out—empty my gun into some one's guts and see his tongue drop out far beyond the chin. . . . I don't have to do any of that! Some one else is making war! Some one else!" I held my head and swayed sidewise. I put my palm over my mouth to silence myself but I could not. I continued to babble: "I'm on the sidelines. I'm like that slacker who reads the paper in the morning between two cups of coffee and says proudly: 'Our army is victorious. We have taken Junction Six,' and then goes for a morning walk. God, I thank you, I thank you that I don't have to take Junction Six any more. I thank you that I don't have any convictions to defend at the price of some other fellow's intestines. I'll shout anything anybody wants me to. Power—Freedom—Councils—Equality. Oh, hell, I'll agree to anything anybody asks me, but God, let me stay where I am—let somebody else make the war. Somebody else!" I could not stop my hysteria. I pounded the iron grill with my forehead.

I suppose I should be ashamed of all those thoughts. I am. It is hard to write them. But they were in me. And they were filling up my soul to the brim, making me ghoulishly content one moment and miserable another. Not for a long time had I experienced such happiness as when I knew that it wasn't I who had killed those four policemen. I was ready to dance around them. And yet when I remembered that theoretically I belonged with those four black-clad figures, but that I had done nothing for them, I wanted to spit into my own face.

CHAPTER VIII

HUNTER'S ROW

How empty Hunter's Row looked! The old houses and the market booths seemed tired. Bolted and dark, they bent forward and leaned on one another. The ancient walls of the stone houses were monotonous as prison walls. I could not make out their weatherbeaten colors, nor the signs which I knew hung in all directions—small and large, square and oblong, black, white or red; with golden letters or silver ones. Signs which on a sunny winter day looked like harlequin puppets, piled by thousands in long disorderly rows against huge white sheets of snow. Racing sleighs with black trotters used to cut through the brilliant whiteness like swallows. Figures clumsy with warm clothes, rolled away from their paths and shook fists good-naturedly, hoping in loud disgust that horse, driver and passenger would all break their necks.

The laughter and the singing cries of the merchants were cheerful music in a major key. The passionate cooing of thousands of pigeons sounded bright and foolish, as though they were in love for the first time in their lives. But how could that be? They were so fat and big and dignified, senators all their lives long. And yet so foolish. It used to be that kind of place. One had to be a happy fool if one wanted to stay in it for a while.

But once happy, there were so many things to enjoy. The venders of printed cotton kerchiefs walked about like giant peacocks and birds of paradise. Scarlet, blue and pink, green and vermilion, they screamed their colors into the

wind. The venders carried them on their arms, shoulders, hands and on special racks held high above their heads. They shook them as birds do feathers.

Booksellers blinked spectacled eyes at customers, measuring them and wondering if it would be worth while to show the good books hidden in trunks inside their booths. Sometimes they had big black or striped cats dozing on their laps. The cats told them if a customer were worth bothering about. And the cats seldom made a mistake.

Hunter's Row was rich in cats. All sorts of cats. Not the bedraggled slinkers of dark alleys. No, these were respectable, law-abiding, settled cats, each with a steady income, with conservative views of life and with plenty of time. Their amorous worries were for ever removed, but this last was hardly an achievement of their own.

They were all intelligent and highly specialized. The cats from a butcher-shop never went into a fish store or a smoked goods store. They knew where they belonged. The fattest and the most important presided in fish stores. And the bigger and better the store, the bigger and better the cat which governed it from the only warm spot, the arm of the proprietor's chair. Those fish stores were fabulous. White marble slabs covered with sturgeon, eels, salmon, carp, mackerel, halibut; plump, gigantic, proud with the importance of the nourishment they held in them. The boys who sold them looked like fish themselves. Their white shiny aprons were like the belly of a sole. I liked to watch their eyes and the silly look on their fat red faces when some one asked them if the fish were fresh. They were insulted. "There ain't no fresher." After which they would pout their lips exactly like a fish and look at the cat, and the cat would look at them. "What an idiotic question," the salesman's eyes would signal to the cat. And the cat would answer, licking his paw and purring: "As if I'd eat a fish

that wasn't fresh!" Sometimes a splash from the huge tanks of live trout confirmed their silent conversation. But how jolly the salesmen were if one did not ask them stupid questions, did not bargain and did not ask for fish which were out of season. They would get a spoonful of fresh caviar and graciously ask you to try it. You were welcome not to buy. It was a present. You ate it without a speck of salt, cold, tender, fresh, and with only a hint of fishy taste. A perverted delicacy—in one tablespoonful a thousand unborn souls of sturgeons. They melted in your mouth while the cat rubbed his back on your trousers leg.

You moved on and were passing the open door of the Greek store of spices piled in jars, bundles, bags, bottles, boxes and cans, ceiling-high on broad long shelves. The aroma pouring out was so strong and subtle that you found yourself inside before you knew it. It was quiet, warm and dark with "all the drowsy sirups of the East." If their keeper knew you, you could ask him to let you sniff the fragrance of amber in a tiny silver jar, or inhale once the thick sensuous odor of violet oil which was priced at five hundred rubles a pint. You could not stay long—you felt intoxicated and weak. The small, black, beady eyes of the Greek hypnotized you. You walked out into the fresh air, staggering.

And the first thing you stumbled into was a cake vender. Oh, what a relief! There was no mystery about him, so loud, so piercing in praise of his hot cakes, so fast in his answers and exclamations, so friendly and hospitable, that before you could say: "Two, with sugar on," the fragrant grease was running down your fingers and you were biting the light, hot tasty dough of both cakes at once. The pink face of the pedler, softened by steam rising from his tray, looked at you with approval, a smiling Buddha in the white clouds feeding a worm with his own flesh. They liked you

and took care of you in Hunter's Row. The air might be twenty below freezing, but none the less, this was the warmest spot on earth.

It was not the same place to-night. It was a cadaver. And as if into the eyes of a cadaver, I stared straight ahead of me into the double opening of the Iberian Gates. Something was missing there. The silhouettes of a large crowd were huddled around the gates as usual, but something was lacking in the familiar outline. It struck me suddenly. "Where is the Chapel of the Iberian Mother of God?" The chapel used to have glass doors, and when its dozens of small candles were burning, it looked at a distance like a huge lantern standing on the ground and spreading a flickering glow. Now everything was dark inside, not a single candle burned. It changed the whole look of the place. It was as if some one whom you had known, some one with beautiful warm and wise glowing eyes, had suddenly lost them and looked at you with black empty holes. The chapel was the soul of Hunter's Row. It was the only place there which never lost the spark of life. Day or night, winter or summer, blizzard or heat, it glowed warmly for everybody who wanted to look into the dark Byzantine face of God's Mother. It was blotted out now. Hunter's Row was a cadaver indeed. Its soul was no more.

I turned away and looked to my left. Five hundred yards away figures were projecting against a small fire. "That must be the post," I said to myself, and slowly went toward it. Five soldiers and a corporal, sitting and standing around the fire, were burning the furniture from the nearest shop, whose bolted door was broken and hung ajar on a single hinge.

CHAPTER IX

HATE

NO ONE asked me any questions, as I walked up. Calmly the soldiers looked me over and continued to crowd around the fire. Fifteen or twenty people, men and women, stood about—passers-by and dwellers in the nearest houses. They were talking freely about the news, pestering the soldiers with questions. But the soldiers were sulky and non-committal, except to a joke or a story.

“Why can’t we go on through to the Red Square?”

“Why don’t you let us pass?”

“It’s two o’clock. We’ve got to get home and get some sleep.”

“Why can’t we cross Hunter’s Row?”

Not a single one of these inquiries was answered. They might as well have been uttered in a foreign language. When some one, disgusted at the indifference of the guards, started across the street on his own, a boorish voice sounded quickly, “Here you. Get back. Want a bullet?”

Hunter’s Row was a sort of anteroom to the Red Square, and the volleys coming from it showed that the soldier meant what he said. People who, like myself, had come from side-streets, were not molested but were not allowed to go farther.

Two gaudy women seemed to get along nicely with the guards. They expressed no wish to go anywhere and did not appear to mind the late hour. One wore a hat piled high with artificial fruit and flowers, and over the hat a warm green shawl which covered her shoulders and breast.

The other, instead of a shawl, had a huge fur collar on her red plush coat. Her head, with its little astrakhan hat, disappeared completely inside the collar. Giggling loudly, the women teased the soldiers. Just as I came up they slipped away from the crowd and started to saunter off across the street, throwing mischievous glances at the guards.

One of the soldiers, short and stout, said quietly: "Come back, you sluts. We told you you couldn't go that way." The women laughed loudly and stopped. One made a mocking military salute, and holding hands they skipped, clowning, in a small circle, then started again to move away.

The soldier got up. "Just look at them," he said and, lifting his rifle to his arm, shot into the air.

Screaming, the women ran back, stumbling over their long skirts; their hands, in muffs, raised above their heads. Everybody laughed. The women threw themselves at the soldier, hugging him, hanging on his neck, pushing and pulling him, till all three fell flat on the pavement. The crowd enjoyed the show heartily. Men made rowdy remarks, and the soldiers threw little pieces of ice and dirt at the jumbled trio. The other women in the group turned their heads away, trying not to laugh. Leaning toward each other, they whispered and chuckled.

On the ground, the two women got on top of the soldier and began to tickle him. He cursed. Somebody said, "Pull his pants off." The laughter became louder. A soldier with a black mustache bent over and gave one girl a wallop with the palm of his hand.

"Atta boy!" exclaimed a man who looked like a janitor. "That's a hot one, give her another!" He lifted his leg and slapped his knee: "A good one!"

The black mustache whacked the woman again. She jumped up and turning around, sat down this time on the soldier's belly. "Say, you mare's delight!" she yelled, "are

you going to destroy an honest working girl? What kind of a 'Worker's' defender are you?"

"Ha, ha, ho, ho—he, he," went the crowd. Tired and gasping for air, the other woman tried to get up but also got a heavy slap on her back from the corporal, who turned his head quickly and pretended to be innocent. She turned on him and drawled mockingly with an exaggerated refinement of pronunciation: "Don't kiss me so passionately, Alphonse." She helped her friend to get up and both then sat down on the curb of the pavement near the fire. The soldier on the ground was gasping and trying to recover from the attack of tickling and laughter. With tears in his eyes, between gasps of air, he spoke reproachfully, addressing the mob: "Did you ever see such bitches? I ask you? Nearly broke my ribs! Look," he turned to the corporal, "my shirt's out!" Again an outburst of laughter.

When that dwindled away everybody quieted down. The shooting in the Red Square fell almost to nothing. Two, three shots at a time. Most of us sat on the pavement or leaned against the walls. A soldier, who until now, had been very quiet, started to sing a rhythmic southern song:

"My apple, tiny apple—
Where are you rolling?
Red apple, sweet apple,
Let me roll
My tired heart
Along with you. . ."

The two street-walkers picked up the tune and all three sang it softly, their voices sad and sentimental.

I looked around. By a queer freak, a small house brooded by itself on one side of the square. As though forgotten, the ancient house stood a few feet in front of the uniformly aligned buildings, and being low and squatty, it reminded

one of a short fat colonel leading a company of tall and slim soldiers. Between the little house and the buildings behind, was a narrow passage. Here all of us were gathered.

The machine-gun of the post was pointed toward a side-street, and anything coming along that street would be subjected to well-aimed, concentrated fire. The post was well chosen, the machine-gun well placed, but the soldiers were loose and negligent. Only the corporal went now and then to look down the side-street where a regular sentry should have been placed. The rest of the guard smoked or talked or busily fed the fire from a pile of chairs and shelves, smashing them against the wall when they needed a plank.

The crowd was animated and curious: a few of the better class returning from the theater, waiting to cross the Red Square on their way home; a few, unable to sleep, from nearby houses; a few janitors and watchmen; a few night peddlers. Several men gathered around me and asked what was going on in the other streets. I could not tell them much and they were disappointed, especially one, an old man of the government-clerk type. Small and bony, he seemed lost in an old black overcoat with a short mantle around the shoulders. His face, sharp and narrow with a pointed chin, appeared from under a military fur cap from which the cockade had been removed. He kept stamping his feet to keep them warm; he held his hands tucked in his sleeves, but he never went near the fire. As he talked to me, he tried to keep in my shadow.

"Tell me, citizen," he whispered, bringing his face close, "are there many posts between here and Governor's Square?"

I told him I had been stopped by only one.

"Where? How many men?" he asked, drilling me with his eyes. I could hear his false teeth snapping click-clack, click-clack.

When I told him how the four policemen had been killed and one had escaped, he drew in his breath quickly and repeated: "Escaped, you say?" and then exhaled slowly, as if relieved. He smelled of medicine. "So . . . So . . ."

And he disappeared behind a gate. I knew he was a spy.

A half-hour later he was standing beside me again. I had not seen him nor heard him come up. He muttered something in a low voice that managed to be harsh and penetrating. As once more he slid off, the corporal, who was coming back from reconnoitering the side-street, asked sharply: "Where are you going, old man?"

The little man stopped and jerked his head, then said quietly: "I live here in this house, my dear, right here on the third floor, my dear. I have a key, see, my precious?" He showed a key which he held ready in his hand, and moved his head back and forth like a mouse.

"Well, go in then and stay in, comrade."

The old man stood for a while looking at the corporal's back, then again disappeared behind the door.

And now once more hurried shooting rose in the Red Square. Many distant voices shouted. The half-seen mob near the Iberian Gates raised its murmuring to shouts and hooting. The chimes in the Kremlin sang the hour. Three o'clock. The two prostitutes and the bearded soldier started a new song:

"Sleep my baby, sleep my beauty,
Bye-o—bye—bye-o.
The moon in heaven watches closely
Diamond stars and you."

A group of well-dressed people, five women and two elderly men, approached the corporal. The men held back while the three women came forward and began to speak with forced politeness.

“Citizen, how can we reach home? We have to pass through the Red Square. We seven live across the Moscow River. Can’t you give us a guard and let us go on?”

No one answered. No one even turned a head. The fire, devouring the dry varnished wood, was cracking and leaping joyously. Sparks jumped high in the air and came slowly down. The three women looked at one another. One of them sighed. The eldest, who had spoken, bent toward the corporal. Her soft white hair, set off by long black earrings, showed a little from under a hat of seal fur. The pink reflection of the fire made her face look young and soft, but her eyes were watery and old. She spoke again, carefully and distinctly, “Citizen, please—I give you my word. We won’t look at anything. We won’t take part in anything. We are old tired people, Corporal. . . . All we want is to reach home as soon as we can. Please, Corporal.” She touched his shoulder with black-gloved fingers.

The corporal threw a chair he was breaking into the fire and impatiently kicked a half-burned piece of wood farther into the ashes. He turned sharply: “Comrade, don’t annoy me. I won’t let you go toward the Red Square. If you have to go across the river, go through Chinatown.”

“Oh, my God!” exclaimed the other women, “it’s five miles farther that way.”

“What the hell do I care?” The corporal stretched himself.

“You don’t care,” the first old lady spoke again, “but I do. I’m old and I don’t think I could walk that far.”

“Then take root here,” he snapped.

The soldiers giggled. The two street-walkers stopped singing and sat quiet.

The old lady pursed her lips, trying to be calm. “You don’t need to be so rude,” she said with dignity.

Before she had finished, a voice behind her spoke de-

liberately and hatefully: "Scum—you cursed Red scum!" It was the white-haired woman's husband.

The crowd, soldiers and bystanders, startled, looked at him. The three women all spoke at once, trying to calm the old man. I heard a few words in French. The corporal jumped to his feet. His broad red face, lighted from below by the fire, shone like snake skin. The wrinkles around his broad nose twitched up and down. His upper lip, thick and covered with small patches of hard bristle, trembled, disclosing small, shiny white teeth. He looked at the man who had said "scum" and slowly moved toward him.

The old lady stepped between them. "Don't pay any attention to him, please, comrade!" she said desperately. The corporal brutally pushed her away. Supported by the other women, she came back swiftly, one hand on her breast. The other hand she put on the hand of the man. "Vania, please," she said.

We all moved closer. The corporal again pushed the elderly lady away, this time sidewise, by her shoulders.

One of the prostitutes jumped up and exclaimed: "Must you push the old woman, you dirty Napoleon?"

The other one snapped at her, "Shut up! It ain't your business, is it?"

All that time the elderly man stood motionless. The corporal grabbed the lapel of his overcoat and jerked it, screaming furiously: "Who's red scum? Who! Who!" He tore apart the buttons and buttonholes of the man's overcoat. It swung open. In the light of the fire an officer's uniform glistened underneath. The white cross of St. George on a black and yellow ribbon shone against the dark green cloth of a peace-time infantry tunic. All the soldiers sprang to their feet. The old lady threw herself wildly at the corporal but the other soldiers grabbed her. Backing away from the officer, the corporal looked at

him, grinning. As if discovering a new star in heaven, he repeated rapturously:

"Officer . . . officer . . . officer . . . a bloodsucker . . . White Hand . . ." The gloating in his voice seemed to choke him.

The officer, silent, looked straight ahead. The fire was reflected in the whites of his eyes and gave them a pinkish tint. Everybody waited, tense. Then the corporal suddenly swung his arm and clumsily, with a dull thud, smashed his black fist into the man's face. Once, twice. The officer, still silent, jerked his head back and swayed without raising his arms. He licked his lips. Women screamed. Men talked. Soldiers pushed them with rifles and hands. Some of the crowd backed away and walked quickly into the side-street. The officer's group huddled together, helpless and furious. Their old voices could scarcely be heard in the general noise. All I could make out was the fast movement of their bloodless lips and the accusing fingers of their old wrinkled hands. The white-haired woman's voice hovered above all. Raising her hands above the shoulder of the soldier who held her, she forced her voice out painfully: "Beast—can't you see that the man is blind?"

The corporal put his hand to his holster to get out his gun, but women from the crowd rushed up and hung on his arms. A huge pie vender, her sheepskin coat shaking with excitement, grabbed his hand fearlessly. With two hundred and fifty pounds of flesh and a hundred pounds of skirts, felt boots and overcoat, she clung to him. She berated him in a rage:

"You're crazy, falcon dearest," she raged at him in her broad nasal Volodimir brogue. "Shooting a lot of people. Do you think they're partridges? Aren't you afraid of God Almighty? And a blind man among them! You empty skull, you!" Before the corporal could answer, she smothered.

ered him with her trayful of pies, her breasts and arms. "You just try and shoot them and I'll turn you over my knee and give you such a licking as you never had before! Come on, you heathen, the war is over. Forget it. Have a piece of pie, you Antichrist!" she added unexpectedly, opening her steaming trayful of hot cabbage pies. Grabbing one, she pushed it into the corporal's mouth. The pie was hot and the corporal had to take it in his fingers, so he let the gun alone. Busily she handed out a pie to each of the other soldiers, talking all the time and winking to the group around the blind officer to slip away. They did not obey her but remained huddled together as if hypnotized. In the half-choked state which proceeds an outburst of rage or hysteria, they could not even talk any more. The women sobbed as if belching, the men gazed silently. The munching corporal cooled off, but did not forget them. He ordered a guard to take the group to his superiors in the Red Square, and, his mouth full, shouted each sentence louder and louder as they were led away:

"You wanted to go through the Red Square, your honors—ladies and gentlemen. . . . You're going now. . . . Straight through and to the nearest wall. . . . Give my regards to Saint Nicolas, you dog's litter!"

The seven dark figures moved slowly, the blind man ahead, guided by his wife and one of the other men. A soldier, holding a rifle by the strap and chewing cabbage pie, walked behind them. If the Iberian Mother of God had had all her candles lighted, the figures would have been silhouetted against their light. And the two men and five women might have felt warmer and more hopeful, not so tired maybe. But no candle flickered in the chapel, and the seven black figures and the gray one melted away in the darkness, leaving a heaving silence. A boat sinking with all hands aboard, on the high seas, leaves such a silence.

CHAPTER X

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE BLACK OVERCOAT

INTO that silence, from the other end of Hunter's Row, thundered several trucks without lights, their exhausts wide open.

Presently we began to hear shots from all directions. The soldiers, as they heard the revolt spreading over the town, became excited and pleased. They no longer avoided questions. Instead, they began to feel important and volunteered explanations. The shooting was part of a pre-arranged plan. The Councils stationed in Moscow had been ordered to exterminate all White officers and to occupy all government buildings, especially the Arsenal; also the municipal water, gas and electric plants and the telephone and telegraph offices. Most of these were in the hands of the Councils already, but the Whites had induced the military cadets, the police and most of the University students to defend the rest. Hence the shooting. The White officers were drifting toward the Kremlin where city officials hid behind the walls. The Reds were catching them on their way.

Five miles outside Moscow artillery units were stationed. They had not yet taken sides. For twenty-four hours the artillery barracks had seethed with continuous meetings. The corporal and his soldiers had no doubt that the artillery would turn "Red." One of them said: "We're expecting two regiments of 'front men.'" (The soldiers from the trenches were called thus.) "Wait till they come! The Kerensky outfit ordered them here to use against us. So

they packed them into trains and shot 'em straight through. No stops anywhere, to Petrograd. And listen! On the way they turned Red and threw every bloody officer under the wheels. Now they're rushing here. Ha, ha, ha! Imagine the Whites' embarrassment!"

Time after time the figure of the little old man in the long black overcoat came out from its door and disappeared again. I wondered at the stupidity of the corporal who had flown into a rage and nearly killed seven elderly people, one of them blind, because of an officer's uniform, yet allowed an amateur spy to work clumsily right under his nose. At least a dozen men, some young, some old, stood in the crowd. "How many of them," I thought, "are Whites?" The soldiers clung to their fire. Over and over again the machine-gun was left alone, unguarded. The stacked rifles were not handy. The post could easily have been taken by surprise.

Sitting on the sill of a shop window, I began to dream. "What would I do if I had my lancers with me? How many would I need? How would I attack this post? Would I do it openly or catch them unaware?" I forgot where I was. I felt for my unexisting gun, looked around and slid down to the ground, closing my eyes. Under the darkness of my eyelids were the images of the two lancers I had liked most—the long thin Bartek, who died at Kreszowitze, and my orderly, Watzek, who had cried like a baby when I told him that he must not come with me to Moscow. Bartek's face stood out clearly in the darkness. He had the same expression as when I had seen him last, sliding down his lance, mortally wounded. Rather astonished and pensive, I whispered: "Bartek, you take the corporal and that short one next to him—go around—stand behind—wait for my shot."

I shuddered. I was seeing things. Maybe I had

fallen asleep and talked in my sleep. I must be careful. I got up. I was alone under the wall. The rest were all standing close to the fire. It was about five in the morning and the cold chilled me to the bones. The people and the leaping tongues of flame swam and swayed in circles. And suddenly, right from the midst of the fire, the face of Watzek swam out and moved slowly toward me, getting bigger and bigger. I saw nothing but his childish lips and horrified eyes. He whispered, "Why didn't you put your warm stockings on? You'll catch cold. Let me take off your boots." His face disappeared and I felt something touching my leg. Watzek taking off my boots. I woke up. I found myself walking along the pavement, the old man in the black overcoat walking beside me. He was kicking my feet. I started and came to my senses. The row of white false teeth gazed at me. Then the large gray eyes, encircled by red lids. Then the withered lips whispering, "Cavalry officer? Clinking your spurs? I could recognize you among thousands. Be careful." And he moved away.

I felt a shiver shaking my insides. One of the childish traditions of the Cavalry School was a walk permitted only to seniors; the juniors had to practise it secretly to use it when their turn came. It was a leisurely stroll. At each step one heel slightly touched the other without effort or loss of balance. When the heels met, the spurs twanged gently. I was, in my half dreamy state, strolling that way around the Red infantry soldiers. They must know that trick of cavalry lieutenants. If they had noticed it they would have signed me off. I looked around for the little man in the black overcoat with the short mantle, but he had again disappeared inside the house.

Everybody seemed drowsy. One of the soldiers was playing a mouth harmonica softly. Another stuck a pie on a bayonet and toasted it over the fire, turning it slowly. The

corporal stood behind one of the street-walkers, his arms around her, his hands, in white knitted gloves, on her breasts, while she tried to evade his fingers. The third soldier was arguing with the fat pie vender for two cabbage pies. He was hungry. The fourth soldier sat on the ground breaking the planks of shattered chairs across his knee and methodically stacking them into neat small piles. The rifles stood against the wall. There was nobody at the machine-gun.

Light was just breaking. I could barely distinguish the Chapel of the Iberian Mother of God. It was surrounded by a clot of misty figures. From the distance they looked like an enormous octopus thrown on the ground, coiling and uncoiling feelers in all directions. A tiny figure of a speaker stood on the roof of the chapel. I could not hear his voice, but I saw him waving his hands. The soldier who had taken away the blind officer came back.

"How about it?" asked the corporal.

"Signed off."

"All of them?" And the corporal linked the fingers of both hands on the woman's breasts.

"No, only the two officers; they let the skirts go."

The fat pie vender spat loudly on the ground. "Blood-sucking beasts—that's what you are," she slammed the cover of her tray. "Get the hell away from me, you insatiable devil," she snapped at the soldier who was bargaining for her last two pies. "Get away, you Judas. I wouldn't sell you a pie if I saw you swelling from hunger. Get away!" she screamed and pushed the face of the soldier who was trying to open the tray by force. He grabbed her. She opened the cover herself, took out the pies and threw them into the fire. "Here, choke on them, you devils. . . ." She swore loudly and walked away. Some of the soldiers laughed at her. The rest sat indifferent. The one who had just come back forked the pies out of the fire with his bayonet

and began to eat them both at once, holding one in each hand. It was painfully cold. Everybody clung to the fire, closer and closer, the soldiers in the center. "Aren't there a few more faces in the crowd?" I thought to myself. "Where did they come from? Nonsense. They've been here all the time." I looked into the tarnished lead of the sky. The black overcoat with the short shoulder mantle, and the little man inside it, appeared again. He came out of the house with small quick steps, almost dancing. Working his way sidewise through the crowd toward the fire, his false teeth fixed in a deadly smile, he repeated emphatically, "I apologize, comrade, I apologize, a thousand times I apologize." When he came up to the corporal, he held out a large tin canteen and five glasses.

"You back again, Spider?" laughed the corporal.

The man in black burst into a queer choking giggle: "Spider, did you say, comrade? Ha! Ha! Ha!" He bent double, laughing. "You can call me Comrade Spider if you wish, my dear. Comrade Spider—that's funny." Nobody else laughed. The man in black went on seriously in a low whisper: "I found some brandy, comrade." He stretched his mouth so broadly that it looked as if his jaws would fall apart. "Real brandy, not moonshine brandy, comrade. God's comfort to a tired heart, to a brave heart! to an heroic heart!" He waved his hand with the four glasses between his fingers and shook his head, bursting again into that unnatural, repulsive giggle. "Oh!" he stopped, stamping his foot. "What am I talking about—God's comfort did I say? Pshaw! there is no God—I'm a stupid fool. God? A fairy-tale! God? A lie! God? A fever of the brain! To the devil's mother with all the gods, saints, virgins and mothers of gods! To hell with all of them! They never did anything to comfort us! Did they, sweetheart?" He poked his head at the woman in the corporal's arms.

“Look into my heart, beautiful. Oh, what a heart it is! A kind and generous heart; a heart of gold. A real Communistic heart, comrades. I assure you!” He addressed the crowd: “Look here. To our warriors, to our defenders, I’ve brought my last brandy. The best brandy you can find in the whole of Moscow. Take a glass, comrade; you too, and you and you.” He gave each soldier a glass and began to fill them to the brim. When the soldier with the black mustache wanted to drink his right off, he almost jumped, hissing: “Stop, stop! A toast! We’ll all drink together. We’ll drink ‘All power to the Councils’ and all together. All together!” Holding out the canteen and pouring liquor into the last glass, he went on speaking fast, “And you, comrade corporal, take the canteen—you drink what is left. Never mind if you do get more than the rest. You’re the chief, you’re the pillar of the Councils. You drink all that’s there.” Shouting “All, all! Bottoms up! Bottoms up!” he threw his hands in the air. Spinning around on one leg, he beat himself on his hips, and imitating a rooster, screeched: “Coo-ca-re-coo!”

The crowd around was lazily amused by his antics. The soldiers grinned at him good-naturedly. One said: “You’re a nut, comrade, but I like the kind of nuts who make me a present of brandy.”

“Now,” the little man clapped his hands and got up on his toes, “all together!” He drew a deep breath, raised his arms like the conductor of an orchestra, projecting his false teeth and dropping each syllable with measured hate, exclaimed: “All power to the Councils, comrades!” The six guards bent their heads back and started to gulp the liquor. There were six shots—each from a civilian who stood behind a soldier. Each shot landed in the back of a neck, and all six of the men fell on their faces into the fire. They wriggled for a few seconds. The crowd gasped and

started to run. The men who had fired the shots paid no attention, quickly grabbed the machine-gun and placed it, aiming it at the crowd around the Chapel of the Iberian Mother of God. They had an unobstructed view, and the distance was about three city blocks. Two of the men lay flat next the machine. Another, behind it, took the handles in both hands and began to spray the distant crowd. The rest, spread flat on the pavement, were already firing the dead soldiers' rifles. From the side-street about a dozen more came, their rifles ready, fell to the ground and fired as fast as they could. The machine-gun clattered on desperately.

I ran away into the same street out of which the Whites were coming. The little man grabbed my sleeve; his false teeth chattered:

"Take a rifle, officer, take a rifle."

I stopped dumfounded for a second. "No," I answered firmly and walked away toward the corner.

I was sure I would be shot in the back. Instead, I heard the little man screaming: "Coward!—Red scum!—Coward!—Judas!—Traitor! Is there really no God on this earth?" I did not turn but walked as fast as I could. A truck swerved and stopped, the brakes screeching. Young boys in cadets' uniforms poured from it, ran past me, cocking the locks of their rifles on the run. The two prostitutes stood in a doorway sobbing loudly and biting their muffs. I walked away up Peter Street until I could no longer catch my breath.

CHAPTER XI

THREE DIMPLES

AT THE first break of light the city came alive, with a queer swarming excitement. Afraid to go out into the open, human creatures crowded in the gates, crawled along the walls and held on to the doorways. Shots and salvos sent bullets swishing down the desolated middle of the streets. The steel-jacketed lead, flying and ricocheting, huddled the people back into every crevice of the reechoing walls. Trucks raced madly down boulevards—giant porcupines bristling with bayonets. The yelling and singing voices of the men on the trucks entwined with the roars of open exhausts and the brawling speed terrified the people even more than the bullets, because they could see the trucks and mark their speed. The well-hidden swarms followed them with their eyes. A long time after they had passed, the streets and squares remained empty, like the bottom of a glass that has been drained of poison. Here and there on the pavements and sidewalks lay quiet bodies.

The sun did not rise. Low clouds crouched above the roofs and towers, dropping rags of mist; you could not tell the mob from cadets, soldiers from spectators. Screening the corners, the mist helped enemies to play hide-and-seek. Onlookers finished the game. Bending over a body they lifted a gray army overcoat from the dead knees and folded it over the face. The overcoats also looked like sinister rags of drab mist. The uncovered dead gazed up at the houses with steady reproach. People screened their windows—as well as they could—with shutters, boards,

clothes or pieces of furniture. The glassy eyes angrily staring up into the cozy apartments were unbearable.

Those fighters who were still alive, knelt, crouched, pulled triggers, crossed streets on the run, shouted, advanced, retreated. But many took no part on either side, morbid neutrals, astounding numbers of them. The population at that time was around one million. Of these perhaps two hundred and fifty thousand were men and boys old enough to take part. On both sides, between fifteen and twenty thousand actually did so; hardly one in fifteen. The rest hid in sheltered houses, with the women and children, or with savage curiosity watched from doorways. Sometimes one risked a little sortie for a block or two and brought back news. Immediately the rest would fall into noisy angry argument. Two battles raged: the bloody one spread out all over the city on the streets, squares, roofs and windows; the other, of words, not blood, in every gate or entrance. Both the battle of blood and the battle of words were conducted at the top of the lungs. The thin voices of young cadets yelled "Hurray!" or sang the *Marseillaise*, as though they were trying to clear away the mist with their outbursts of shrieks. Snatches of the *International* coming from the Reds, shot through continuously as if they were messengers carried steadily by the wind, flying far beyond the city. Sometimes the Red commander of a platoon shouted down the street as if calling across a river for a ferry, "S-e-nd more m-e-n!" The wind swallowed the rest until suddenly two words came clearly across: "Blacksmith's Bridge!" A group in a doorway, where I rested for a while, picked up the words and began a screaming argument, as if every one around were deaf. A well-dressed woman crossed herself and screeched with rapture, "The Whites are on Blacksmith's Bridge—do you hear that?—on Blacksmith's Bridge already...."

“Who told you so?” her cook or somebody else’s demanded rudely, but with the same rapturous note in her voice. “You don’t know what you’re gabbling about.”

“Don’t talk to me that way. How dare you be so impudent? I’m not addressing you. I’m stating a fact . . . and that fact is that the Reds are getting what’s coming to them. . . .”

“Look at her—a walking news reel—sees all, knows all. . . .”

“Well, you’ll know plenty soon enough if you don’t keep your mouth shut!”

“Shut up yourself. Who the hell are you to tell me to shut up?”

“Oh . . . you ungrateful beast, you! Here I’ve spent all my life trying to help and educate your kind—I’m a trench Sister of Mercy——”

The cook interrupted her, “Yah! All the mercy you gave was under the blankets of the gentlemen officers, ha—ha—ha . . .”

Red spotted the insulted woman’s face, and her eyes blazed. She was almost choking. “You . . . you—God, what filth. . . . I’m an officer’s widow. I’ve been decorated with the Medal of St. George. I’ve washed and cleaned and deloused thousands of your kind. I’ve taken care of their wounds—maybe they were your own brother or father. For weeks I didn’t sleep nights, changing the dirty bandages. I . . . I . . . And you—you have the insolence . . .”

The two women faced each other. One, now pale with white blotches of powder hurriedly splashed all over her face, fortifying herself with belief in a white victory, trying hard and loud as never before to be an aristocrat. A member of the intelligentsia, one of the intellectuals who considered it her duty to work for the people and who were so contemptuously spurned by them. Facing her was the cook,

shaking red chubby fingers in her face and talking so fast that each word fell into the next, already sure that the battle was over; that she was now a lady of a new privileged class. Shrilly she proclaimed her belief in that for which her people were dying all around. Until now, everything in her mind had been bounded by the kitchen sink which had been the center of her life.

Furiously she mocked. "You—a Sister of Mercy? Tell that to your grandmother! All you can do is sit on soft cushions and drink coffee. And fuss about it. 'Not sweet enough.' 'Not strong enough.' 'Not hot enough.' You've got to have company for every darn meal and six plates and three glasses and half a dozen knives and forks for every one of them. Did you ever try to wash 'em? Do you know what it feels like to clean them up day after day, night after night? You—a Sister of Mercy! A lazy cow chewing its own belching—that's what you are!"

All the others took sides, in a frenzy about which was right, the cook or the former Sister of Mercy. Like stylized Chinese prints they became so many faces with bulging eyes, so many mouths rounded at the corners, so many pairs of swinging arms. Fast popping words echoed and reechoed from the walls.

The lady of the past wound up, "Wait till to-night, you slummock, you abomination! The Whites will overthrow you Red trash and then you'll see what you get for insulting people and . . ." here the "learned" lady flashed a bit of erudition, ". . . and their righteous government."

To the great merriment of the listeners, the "coming" lady emitted a mocking laugh, oddly in rhythm with the distant crepitation of machine-guns. "Look at her," she exclaimed, sticking her finger almost into the face of the first lady, ". . . the 'White bones' is afraid of being insulted. You couldn't be, my beauty. God insulted you once and for

all when he let you be born, with those brains of yours." Her red knuckles suddenly tapped the other's forehead. At once back came a slap on her laughing red face,—and the two women, to a chorus of yelling laughter, were ready to scratch each other's faces.

Suddenly "ta-pa ta-pa ta-pa" exploded at the gate. The whole crowd screamed and vanished behind pillars of doorways, silently seeking the source of the rattle.

Five men were handling a machine-gun right in front of the gate, shooting along the street. They were all in infantry cadets' uniforms, the oldest no more than eighteen. Their bodies, like the five points of a star, lay behind the gun, as if they were part of the devilish contraption of steel, fire and water. Each time it made an effort, all shivering and shaking, to vomit shells, the bodies of the five young men contracted with its motion and their faces expanded in a grin. A queer scorpion squirting poison and shivering with its five legs. From somewhere bullets were clattering on cobblestones and walls, but the cadets were untouched, probably hardly visible to their opponents.

The water began to boil in the machine-gun, and threw the cadets into commotion. One of them crawled five yards to the gate and, once inside, jumped up and whipped out a Browning from his open holster. The crowd looked on in silence. He stood slim and erect, scarcely sixteen years old, legs spread out, head thrown back, smudged round face with a swollen black eye; a young rooster crowing with victory. With a wide gesture he threw out his left arm. In a voice of basso solidity that was still new to him, he ordered, "Citizens, in the name of the Russian Democratic Republic, a pail of water! Quick! Quick, please!" The new voice broke abruptly and in a high young note, he began to plead like a boy looking for a lost ball, "Come on, please get a move on! Get a move on, citizens. Please!"

At first nobody stirred. All the men and women looked at him as if he were a fire-eater from a side-show who had finished his trick and invited the audience to drink a glassful of burning gasoline. They looked at him, looked at one another and shrank back. Every one was afraid of every one else. Suppose the Reds won? Any one who had given the boy a pail of water would be denounced. Suppose the Whites won? The one who had refused to give the water would be treated as an active Red. And so they stood shifting uneasily. A minute ago they had all known where they belonged, ready to scratch one another's eyes out in argument.

The cadet, rather helpless, moved his gun. His eyebrows went up, he licked his lips. "I'll shoot," he referred to the gun simply and without conviction, as if saying, "I'll complain to my father." Still no one moved. A voice floated from the street between two paroxysms of the steel dog's barking, "Get that water, damn it!" The cadet went straight up to the cook who had argued and fought a minute ago. She was nearest to him. "Where's your apartment? Lead me there."

"Jesus Christ!" the cook exclaimed. "Right here, sir. I haven't done a thing, sir. The lady started it. Keep that gun away from me, will you? The lady slapped me. Everybody'll tell you."

The cadet looked at her bewildered. What was she talking about? "Don't gabble—move on—to the nearest faucet."

Once again came a voice from the street, desperate this time. "Dimka . . . curse your mother! The gun's white hot. Hurry up with that water!"

The cadet turned around and shouted, "Coming!"

Before he finished the word, a child's voice, happy and triumphant, pierced the air. "Here's the water, cadet."

Here's the water. Hurray! War to the victorious end! Hurray!" A shrimp of a boy about ten years old appeared from the back yard carrying a half-filled pail of water, splashing it all over his shoes. He wore a little sailor suit and had a nice clean, blushing face with closely cropped black hair. And three dimples, one on each cheek and one in his chin. They were so ridiculously prominent that one could not look at the boy for long without smiling. The three dimples were as infectious as yawning. Only on a second look did I realize that the boy had large deer-like dark eyes, almost popping out with anxiety and joy. He placed the half-filled pail at the feet of the cadet and saluted him with childish clumsiness, clicking his heels and nearly tripping over himself. Still saluting, he began to sing the *Marseillaise* off key.

"Forward, children of the Fatherland!
The hour of glory has arrived!"

Childishly he rolled his *r*'s.

The woman who had fought with the cook sprang to him. "Stop it, Serge, right away! I told you not to leave your room. Don't you dare to disobey your mother! Go back at once!" She took him by the hand and jerked him angrily. The boy pulled away his hand and stood, still saluting, his eyes on the cadet. The woman was doubly scared, for herself and for her son. If the Reds came out on top! And if some one reported that her son had sung the *Marseillaise*, the hymn of the Whites, and that in childish eagerness he had brought the water, and what was still worse, ostentatiously saluted the cadets!

Again the voice wailed from the street, "Water! Dimka, water!"

The cadet grabbed the pail and started toward the gate.

Suddenly, right into its corner, something spat with fearful force and made about twenty large holes, chopping off the brown plaster and making a big white splotch. The Communists had begun to answer with a machine-gun. The cadet stopped in his tracks, for a second he lingered, then bent low and shot across the pavement. He dropped to his knee and began to manipulate the white-hot cooler, spilling water all over it and covering himself and the machine-gun with clouds of steam. But his four comrades, all talking at once, cursing and swearing, ran away toward the gate. "She's dead—oh—damn it! What the hell without water! . . . Dimka, you bastard. . . . It's too late now. . . . Drop it, Dimka. . . . Dimka. . . . She's twisted. . . . Take the lock out. . . . Come on. . . . Let's go!"

It was too late for Dimka. He lay across the barrel of the steel spider, covering it, convulsively jerking, and crawling with one hand as if swimming.

"They got him," exclaimed one of the cadets. "They got Dimka!" Suddenly his voice broke as if he were on the verge of crying aloud. "Dimka, I told you to come back. . . . I'll help you, Dimka!" He made a movement to run back, but the little boy jumped ahead of him like a jackrabbit, shouting queerly, weakly, "Hurray . . . Hurray!" He flew across the pavement and squatted behind the machine-gun as he had seen the cadets doing. He grasped the two handles with his small hands and as if playing, began to press and pull them. The machine-gun and the body of the cadet across it were silent and immovable. The child continued to shout, "Hurray!" As an answer came a scream from his mother, "Serge . . . Serge! Holy Virgin!" Like an eagle above her nest of little ones she spread her arms and started to run after him. Another splurge of invisible drills chopped chunks out of the pavement. The cadets and the bystanders grabbed

the woman who struggled as though possessed. "Don't go. . . . Don't go, lady. . . . They'll miss him. . . . I'll bring him! They'll catch you while you're crossing!" They all spoke at once in loud shrill voices. One of the cadets began to crawl across the pavement, but the thin voice shouting "Hurray!" stopped. The little body turned over, hitting the cobblestones with its head. The tiny legs in black shoes kicked the air. Some one leaned out from behind the gate and shouted desperately, "Don't shoot. . . . Don't shoot, for God's sake." Every one relaxed strangely and bent forward as if ready to run out in a herd after the boy. But only the mother darted out yelling, "Christ . . ." and ran, repeating over and over, "Christ . . . Christ . . ."

A second later she was back, carrying the little boy in her arms. Her hands were covered with blood. Another volley chewed out a layer from the wall—oblong this time. The woman slumped to her knees and howled like a dog. Her face was dry and the white spots of powder looked more ridiculous than before. A contorted face, fantastic reflection of a clown in a crooked mirror. The crowd and the cadets stood petrified. Not a sound except the distant popping and the long monotonous howling of the woman. The little boy breathed weakly. His eyes were wide open. His mouth was wide open. The three dimples were as prominent as before. He moved his head from side to side and bit the air with his small teeth. I knelt behind him and took his head in my two hands. I tried to find out where he was wounded, to free him from the clutching embrace of the woman. I bent close to his face, looking at it upside down. It suddenly became old. Very old. And wise. The woman howled above my head. Below my face I heard a faint slow whisper, "Hurray! . . . Hur . . ." No more. Not even the faintest sound. The big, brown, deerlike eyes shifted as if annoyed by the woman's howling and remained steady. Dead.

"The Reds are coming! Run!" cried one of the cadets. They whirled around and made for the yard and the back stairways. The crowd, suddenly and indifferently neutral, moved away from the woman and the body of little Serge. Now she slumped still more, and instead of howling, wailed weakly and continuously, "Serge . . . Serge . . . Serge . . ." shifting her eyes as if searching for something, or as if to keep from looking into her child's face. Nobody moved to help her. I laid the heavy little head on the ground. The noise in the street increased.

"Where are the cadets?" a voice roared from the gate. A tall infantry soldier, with rifle ready, stood in the gateway. Behind him the street was swarming with men. Many were civilians and had red scarves around their sleeves. All were armed.

"Where are the cadets, you bastards? I'm asking you!" shouted the soldier again, hovering almost above the woman and her dead child and holding his bayoneted rifle far beyond her head. Turned into marble, those three would have made a statue, "Warrior Defending a Pieta." But for that they would need to be silent. The murmur of voices from the street, the heavy clamor of boots and dragged machine-guns, the voice of the soldier himself, the whining of the mother, all that destroyed the tragic immobility.

"White rot! Where did those cadets go? I'll murder you on the spot, you worm's spawn!"

"Serge . . . Serge . . . Serge . . ." continued the low whining.

And suddenly the cook tore herself away from the crowded doorway and on the run grabbed the soldier's bayonet, swung it to one side, and in a voice which would have dominated a Sunday fish market, yelled, "Get the hell out of here, you bloodsucker! Get the hell out! Look what you've done, you swine, you murderer. Look!" She

pointed at the little corpse. "Is that who you're fighting with? Killing children! Get the hell out of here—the whole lot of you!"

"Now, wait a moment, comrade, wait a moment . . ." The soldier began, then looked down.

The woman at his feet moved her head up and down keening with the same lamenting exhaustion, "Serge . . . Serge . . ."

The cook twitched as if bitten by a snake and bent over the woman and the little body. "Stop hollering—stop groaning, lady. It can't be helped now. Cry—cry with tears—it'll ease you. I'll take care of you, lady, and of the little angel too. . . . Oh, God! Come on here," she commanded the crowd. "Close the gate. Get the hell out of here to the devil's mother! There are no cadets here!" With both hands she pushed the soldier and a few others who had entered the gate behind him. "Get out—get out!" she continued and pushed the armed men. One slapped her hands and turned on her angrily, "Say, you White?" The cook flung her two fists at him threateningly. "Who's White? Me White? You lousy mug! You diseased mushroom! You idiot! Can't you see that I'm Red? Have you no eyes in your blockhead? I am redder than you are, you milk sucker. Look at my hands. Red—Red—Red—that's what they are. . . . Red all through! Get the hell out of here!" She screamed with all the force she could pull out of her short, stout, strong body. She pushed him once more and slammed and locked the grilled iron gate.

A few soldiers stuck their faces through the bars, laughing at her fury. "Hurray for the 'Virgin of Orleans!'" a young voice shouted.

Another topped him. "Come on with us, Red Carnation. You fight the Whites and we'll go drink tea."

The one who had charged her with being White put two

fingers in his mouth and whistled shrilly, "Hey, you mare! Will you be home to-night? I'll come and call on you."

"She'll bite your nose off," still another voice giggled.

"Get a move on—get a move on! Watch the next crossing," the first soldier commanded. He turned around to the cook. "So long, Field Marshal! Keep your gate shut. . . . Move on, comrades!"

The cook, on her knees by the mother and the dead child, paid no attention to the mockery. "Cry, my little dove, I'm telling you. Cry with tears. Don't wail. Squeeze a tear out of yourself—otherwise you'll choke. God have mercy on his innocent little soul! He wants you to cry. I tell you, God wants you to cry. . . ."

The mother made desperate effort. Hiccoughing, she said, "I . . . can . . . not . . . cry . . ." and swooned in the arms of the Red cook.

I looked at the face of the little boy. The closed gate threw a shadow over it, and the three dimples had disappeared.

CHAPTER XII

MOVE ON, LITTLE LOG

IN THE side-streets the mist was thicker, but there was no fighting, and the blank mute houses were not so sinister. People were beginning to gather at the crossings instead of in doorways and gates. A few stray ghosts sat on curbs or steps. Sounds of shooting hung about these streets as the noise of a factory hangs about its grounds. It was difficult to distinguish whether it was close by or far away.

Again I was on the way home. Somebody directed me straight ahead, somebody else to the left, then many blocks back, then again to the left. I went on and on, turning often around corners and doubling where I could not find free passage. People snugly clinging to their homes were ready to help any civilian trying to get to his home. Fighting Whites and Reds as a rule did not wish to be disturbed or annoyed. Neither side wanted to drag civilians into the fight. From the Whites I got as friendly advice as from the Red lieutenant of the night before.

I found myself in a narrow crooked alley paved with small, slippery, rough cobblestones and bordered with two- and three-story apartment-houses. The alley had been abandoned by Reds and Whites. Men and women sat on the benches by the gates talking leisurely, as if waiting for something to end.

An elderly janitor called to me, "Who's gaining, young man?" as he might have asked, "What horse is winning the third race?"

Without stopping, I said I didn't know.

“Where’re you coming from?” he shouted after me.

“Peter Street,” I said, still without turning my head. By this time I was passing another house. On its steps two women, with warm shawls over their shoulders, sat cracking sunflower seeds. There is a swift art in eating the seeds. The right hand picks a seed from the bag between thumb and forefinger, then with one dexterous movement pitches it into the mouth, the teeth crack, the mouth spits the shell out sidewise. Pitch, crack, spit, in regular rhythm.

“Lots of shooting down there,” one of them threw at me,—pitch, crack, spit.

She looked so smug. In a sudden rage I snapped at her sharply, “People being killed down there.”

Pitch, crack, spit. “Well, not all of them,”—pitch, crack, spit.

From behind me a truck thundered by. Jammed with cadets, it swayed and jumped on the rough pavement. The crowded dun-colored bodies shifted and moved with every jerk, as if part of the truck. Hands shot out now and then and grabbed the nearest thing they could lay hold of—the edge of the box, the top of the driver’s seat, the shoulder of the nearest man. Like flexible branches, arms waved in the air, catching at balance for their owners. Cadets hung on to the running boards and lay along the mudguards, and their bayoneted rifles stuck out far ahead like the feelers of a cat.

They had just reached the corner, when from the opposite direction, another truck flashed out full speed ahead. Tortured brakes split the air. The rear of the cadet truck swung up on to the pavement and cut off a lamp-post at its base. The post toppled over the truck. The cadets raised a great shout and bristled suddenly with upraised arms and bayonets exactly as a frightened animal bristles the hair along its spine. With a clang, the second truck jumped on

to the same pavement, slid along the curb and crashed side-wise into the engine of the first; then turned as if on a pivot and crashed again into its side. The impact jolted every nerve in my brain. The explosion of steel on steel fell with unbearable weight on my ears; the bellow of smashing machinery kept on for an unbelievable time. It looked as if the two trucks would never get through biting each other. Another shattering roar, and the first truck turned over, spilling its cadets on to the pavement like pears from a basket. The second careened crazily and lay on its side.

I began to run. "What next?" pierced my deafened brain. But broken steel had done its all. Slowly a few figures crawled up from the ground. A few more began to disentangle themselves from the wreck.

Men and women around me were running, too. "Look at that—look at that," they shouted. "Head on! Who are they? Whites? Reds? . . . Don't know. . . . Full to the brim. . . . Both of them. . . . Hurry up. . . . All killed? There's some one moving! Hurry up! God, what a wreck!"

Windows flew open. From every entrance people appeared and began to talk loud, point fingers, wave hands to the windows in the upper stories and call to their owners to come down. There had been about a hundred men in the two trucks, Whites in one, and Reds in the other, all heavily armed. The pavement was strewn with rifles, some of them broken. One stuck up between two stones and swayed on its bayonet as if on a spring. Cadets and Communists were thrown into a twisted hash of bodies by the impact. Those who were not hurt acted as if awakened roughly from sleep. Some dropped their weapons and held their heads in both hands. Some still held their rifles and leaned on them. Immobile, their legs spread, they breathed heavily. Some sat down and looked inanely at the wreck

and at the gathering crowd. Some tried to say something, to explain what had happened but were unable to find words. Others talked continuously, stuttering without sense. A few looked around and spoke to nobody in particular, "God, what horror. God, what horror!" One cadet with a smashed wrist was waving it, spattering blood and crying, "A doctor . . . I've got to have a doctor. Where can we find a doctor? An ambulance. . . . Can we get an ambulance?"

"No telephones working. . . . There's a doctor in the next block," a young boy told the cadet and turned his back on him.

The people paid little attention to those who stood on their feet and talked. They gave all their morbid curiosity to those who were crushed in the wreck. And again, as with the pail of water an hour earlier, nobody knew what to do. Nor did they want to know. These armed men, Reds and Whites, were wedging with their lives the future of these onlookers. Yet, they gaped and chattered as if at strange and unknown animals who had been caught in a trap. It had been different during the war. There the civilians would bring water or carry wounded into a shed or cut a boot with a knife and take it off. Or run and bring some one who knew what to do. And not only for their own side. Germans or Austrians got the same attention. There would be some sort of normal action. Here, nothing but an abnormal inertia. Not a passive inertia, but an active deliberate standing off, cruel and cowardly. Each one was afraid to help either side. Each was careful not to betray his sympathies. Old men, young men, women, children—stood and gazed at torn flesh and crushed bones, and pointed their fingers at them. I was not any better than the rest. I also stood and stared at this horror which did not concern me.

The wreck looked like a giant cherry pie in a steel dish

dropped from a great height on to the stone pavement, the steel broken into pieces, the cherries splashed all over. Perhaps twenty people from each truck were not much hurt. The rest were crushed underneath or scattered around. A few crawled away, leaving red marks behind them. Between the truck and the wall of the house the bodies were piled three deep on top of one another. One of the cadets lay immobile on the opposite sidewalk, clutching his rifle. He had been thrown clear across the street by the impact.

In the circle formed by the crowd the forty slightly hurt men wandered aimlessly. The driver of the White truck was the first to come to his senses. His arm hung limp and he held it with his other hand. He was in an officer's uniform but had lost his cap. I was astonished to hear him suddenly raise his voice, "I was on the right side and I slowed down. Where the hell were you looking?" He barked at a worker in a civilian gray overcoat hung with two shell ribbons and a Sam Browne belt. A gray mop of hair flopped over a bruise on his forehead.

The worker stuttered, "Comrade officer, you're talking through your hat. You were too near the curb. Vaska never had a chance to swing around you. Look here—see those tracks?" He pushed the onlookers away and pointed to the tracks of his truck.

The officer also pointed to them triumphantly. "Yes. Just what I said, you old fool. In the middle of the street. What business did you have there? What could I do? If you'd been where you belonged I'd have had room to pass you."

Another worker broke in, waving his hands like a windmill. "Nonsense! Damn fool nonsense, comrade. The way you were going, comrade——"

Jumping at him, the officer yelled, "Don't you call me 'comrade,' you Red scum! I never fed pigs with you!"

“The way you drove, you couldn’t feed a s-s-s-k-kunk . . . your d-d-d-og’s honor!” the worker stuttered.

The crowd giggled inanely. The officer jerked his foot impatiently, trying to kick the man, but stumbled over a rifle and groaned loudly, grabbing his smashed shoulder. The whole arm hung like a wet towel and swayed back and forth until the officer stopped it with the other hand. Having done that, he went to the wall and leaned against it, looking into the sky.

The stuttering worker looked after him in disgust, “Broke all your ‘White bones,’ did you?” And another added contemptuously, “A driver he calls himself!” Then seriously he recited an old proverb to the crowd around him, “Make a fool say his prayers and he’ll break his neck.”

The moans and cries of the wounded got me. I went over and began to help a cadet to free his leg from the debris. He moaned and sucked air continuously. A few women stood around us, and one of them said, “A child—Mother of God!—nothing but a child! What is it they want to shed their blood for, instead of getting some fun out of their young lives? Oh!” she whined, “I can’t bear to look at his leg!” She turned away and hid behind the others but did not stop peeping over their shoulders. The leg was flattened and bleeding profusely.

A muffled voice howled from under a truck, “Get me out of here—for the sake of God Almighty, get me out! Get me out. . . . Get me out!” Bystanders fell on their knees to look under; they shouted to the man as if he were in a deep well. One Red worker crawled all around on his belly trying to locate him.

Another, with red bits of calico tied to each sleeve and a band of the calico around his felt hat, got up on the wreck with an air of command and shouted, “Comrades, give us a hand. Lift this bus. There’s a man alive underneath!”

The White officer picked up his command without moving away from the wall, "Come on, citizens! Come on, cadets!"

"Man alive underneath. Man alive," was repeated by many voices. The crowd shifted its attention to the overturned helpless iron box. All began to propose ways of rescuing the buried man. There were scores of mutilated bodies right under their feet. No one paid attention to them. All were busy with the incredible idea that a live man was buried underneath the whole mess. At last the stuttering worker began to pull bodies and wounded men away from the wreck. This was a signal for everybody, and in no time the space was cleared. I helped two workmen to carry away the cadet with the broken leg. Limp figures were placed along the wall—one corpse—three wounded—two corpses—one wounded—in the order they were picked up. All along the wall, and quickly, one after another. But still most of the crowd only watched avidly and shook their heads. "Look at this one. . . . Oh, my God! . . . I tried to telephone but it isn't working. . . . An ambulance couldn't get here anyhow. . . . See that axle—see that axle—twisted like a piece of wire. The wheel rolled down to the next block. . . . Careful with that match—there's gasoline all around. . . . This one is dead. . . ."

The commanding workman again raised his voice, "Now come on, everybody—all hands here! Come on, let's lift that truck! All of you, comrades. Come on, everybody! All hands on the truck!"

They swarmed around it, Whites and Reds, trying to get a hold on something. They all pulled and attempted to lift or shift the dead carcass of the chassis. The stuttering worker rushed from one to another, "All together! Wait—don't pull separately. Let's throw our strength together." But no one listened. At the corner of the truck a cadet and another worker, young and fat as a bull, were arguing:

"I'm telling you, stupid, you can't pull here. She'll slip and crush him. Can't you see the edge rests here on the curb? If it's moved, the truck'll go down a foot."

"I see it all right, comrade cadet, but if you don't lift here, he can't crawl out. This is the highest spot. Everywhere else it's slammed down to the earth!"

The man underneath wailed like a sheep, "Get me out of here, brothers! I can't stand it. Somebody's guts are choking me!"

"Come on, everybody! Come on—help the living soul. Comrades, get a hold along this edge." Many voices shouted at once and at once answered themselves. "All right. Everybody ready? Let's go!" But their disjointed efforts were fruitless. The truck did not budge.

"No—no—you can't do it that way, comrades. It's too heavy. Let us organize. Come on, let's organize. That's right—let's organize. Let's tackle it all at once. A *Little Log* will help us. That's right—that's the way—with a song! Comrades, all together! Start the *Little Log*—start the *Little Log*, comrades." And the stuttering old worker began, off key, an old Russian lumber song used when a crew hauled a log. First came a stanza that served as timing for a rest period. The worker dashed quickly through the lines:

"Wise English and Germans invent engines
Wherever work needs to be done.
A Russian peasant will struggle and sweat
Humming, heart-broken, the song of the laborer,
The song of the log which has to move on."

During that stanza the crowd, White and Red, all mixed up together, were taking better hold and shifting from one foot to the other, getting ready to lift. A few onlookers dashed up and took a grip on the remaining free space.

Like a conductor, the worker nodded his head and started the chorus. All the voices of the men who had found a grip went up with him:

“Move on, my little log, move on
Mo-o-o-ve on—mo-o-o-ve on—mo-o-o-ve on.”

The last word was the signal for the lumber gang to pull, and with it, the whole group groaned and pulled up. The body of the truck moved. All faces became red. Two more men ran from the crowd yelling, “Come on! Crawl out! Hurry up!” They went on their knees and extended their hands under the edge of the box. They started to pull.

“Hurry up! Hurry up, brother, or we’ll b-b-b-urst!” stuttered the old worker, his face as red as a beet.

The two men lying on the ground were pulling out the buried worker. His voice sounded from under us as if he were gagged. “Easy—easy, brothers. I’m all right. All tangled up. . . . Now, pull once more—give me your other hand.” His face came out. It was all smeared with blood—and something else much more horrible, something not his own. The excited crowd was shouting, “Come on! Come on! Pull him a little bit more. Hold on, everybody—just one second more. Just a little bit more!” The stuttering worker again began the chorus of the song. Again the whole crowd picked it up:

“Move on, my little log, move on
Mo-o-o-ve on—mo-o-o-ve on—mo-o-o-ve on.”

A jerk and the man was out. He stood up, torn, mired and bloody, and bawled, “Who—a . . .” He was entirely unhurt,—he hadn’t even a scratch.

The group holding the truck let it go and sprang back

shouting "Hurray!" The crowd yelled after them, "Hurray!" And from under the truck a screaming howl of inhuman pain rose like the needle of a tower into the sky—and stopped dead. The bang of the reverberating iron continued to drum.

"Somebody else is down there. Another live one. Don't howl—wait. . . . Comrade, are you alive? We'll get you out, comrade. Where are you?"

Men rushed around in circles. "Stop shouting! I can't hear anything. Quiet, everybody! Let me listen." A few men dropped on the ground. "Comrade, can you hear us?" Not a sound came from underneath.

"No," said the officer-driver who by now had got over his pain, "he's crushed. Not a chance. The other guy must have shoved him and he got under the edge. Nothing doing. Let's go. No use wasting time. Hey! Third platoon—let's go!" He took out his whistle and blew it; then commanded loudly, "Third platoon—pick up your rifles. Get a move on. Herd the prisoners into one bunch. Take those rifles away from the Reds!" A few cadets dashed for the scattered rifles, the rest tried to take them away from those workers who still had them. The officer whipped out his revolver. Tumult banged out like a bursting shell. But it was of a different quality. Rage expressed in obscene words flashed out from both sides as if somebody had poured gasoline on a fire.

The Reds and Whites yelled at each other, "Who the hell do you think are your prisoners, you slimy rats? . . . No you won't, you black carrion! . . . Give me that rifle! . . . Soak him, comrades! Thinks he's captured us. . . . Hold him! . . . Bah, bah, mother's baby hero! . . . I'll show you! . . . Come on, don't talk—give me back that rifle, you White swill. . . . Hit him. . . . Shoot them—shoot them all! . . . Help, comrades! . . ."

And a free-for-all began right next to the wreck, almost on the bodies of the dead and wounded. Like a flock of sparrows, the watching mob scattered. In a flash the street was empty but for the forty men fighting for their lives with fists, heads, teeth and legs. Rifles were used as clubs. The officer was hammering away right and left with the butt of his revolver, fighting with one hand. The stutterer fell down but, lying on the ground, continued to encourage his comrades, "Soak 'em! Soak the cursed Whites! Hit 'em over the head! Trip 'em up!"

Some one fired a shot. Another. A third. Scared heads peeking through windows and from behind doors jerked back as if pulled by some one else.

Then from the end of the alley running figures appeared in gray uniforms with bayoneted rifles held in readiness. About fifty of them shouting "Hurray . . .!" passed me like furies into the center of the fighting group. They descended like hawks on every man who wore a red band and swarmed over the fighters. In a few minutes everything was over. The wounded Reds who had fought were finished where they fell. No prisoners. No quarter. The others remained where they were. The long line under the wall gazed with painful dazed eyes.

The moment the fight was over one of the cadets began to give orders, "Clear the street! Clear the street, everybody! The Reds are coming! Cadets, get behind the truck—behind the corner! Don't shoot without a command. Let them fill up the alley. Hide behind the trucks and stay there!" He raised his voice. "Shut your gates and windows. Get inside! Take the children away!"

I tried to sneak out past the cadets in my direction. The commanding cadet saw me. "Hey, you!" he shouted. "Where are you going? Are you a Red?"

"No," I answered.

“Are you armed?”

Silently I shook my head.

“Frisk him.”

A cadet came and ran over my clothes and pockets. I dropped my head. A dog was licking a puddle of blood under my feet. They let me go.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ELEGANT

I DON'T remember how I got home at last. For two hours after the collision I felt like a swimmer on a moonless night in a deep black river. I was tired and yet I felt I could keep on walking for days along the streets. I was so hungry I had to keep swallowing all the time, still I passed with indifference a group of Red soldiers having a meal, full rations of appetizing food. I did not even ask them for a bite. I would have got it. They were giving food away to any one who stood around and looked hungry. Doing nothing, I was covered with sweat. But my inner struggle used me up as though it were hard physical work; uprooting stumps or the like. If there is such a thing as "active neutrality," I suffered from it. If "non-resistance of evil" really exists, it tormented me. More so because I did not know what this "evil" was. I felt it everywhere around but I could not point to it. Not death and wounds; I was used to those. My mind whirled, lashing itself. "What is this evil?" "Where is this evil?" "What side ought I to take to stop it?"

To-day, fourteen years later, to some people things are clear and understandable. They tell me, "The old world was crumbling to pieces; the new world was rising on its dust. You just missed your chance." Glorious words. They don't mean a thing to me.

I heard them, the same words, on those streets littered with corpses. Words shouted in an ecstasy of conviction. Words blown about like dust in a desert storm. All the

magnificent names they called themselves. "Fiery messengers racing to bring happiness to the people!" "Workman's hand molding the future!" "Hungry giants uprooting the earth!" "Six million men tired of blood—dying to stop all future bloodshed!" Niagara of words! And the fools on the other side: "For freedom!" "For democracy!" "For justice!"

The Kerensky Government was supposed to be Socialist; this White or that was a Socialist, the other was a Liberal; of the Monarchists, almost nothing was heard. But the Reds, too, swore by Marx, by justice, by humanity. Where were we? Who was what? Which was evil? It was too sudden. Our minds were breathless.

I was one of thirty thousand officers in Moscow who took no part in the street fighting. I had an excuse. I was a Pole. The thirty thousand were Russians. When, three weeks later, the Communists ordered all former officers to register or be shot, the thirty thousand came and registered. Later, a third of them fled to the south and joined the Whites. In October they could have crushed the Communists. Two months later they were all doomed.

Why did Brusiloff not fight? At the beginning of the war Brusiloff rode a white horse in full view of the enemy. His word alone would have led thousands, as it had led the Imperial Army across Galicia to the top of the Carpathian Mountains and almost into the Hungarian plains. Why did he sit in his bedroom all that time till a stray, silly ricocheting bullet found and wounded him. Later I saw him walking the streets of Moscow. His gray field uniform showed where the insignia had been removed. He walked as if on slippery ice, but his tall fine carriage still remained that of a leader, an undisguised commander, looking at no one; seeing no one; light blue eyes fixed on the horizon. What was he thinking about? Black Imperial Eagles which

he had stuck on to the rocks of the Carpathians? Or plain Red calico which he had not dragged down from Moscow's towers and cupolas? He was brilliant, still young and impetuous, but, like thirty thousand others, he did nothing.

Around ten o'clock I found myself in front of my door. I rang the bell. Watzek opened it for me,—I had not seen him for two weeks. He was to stay and take care of the apartment, and of lancers and Whites who might need shelter or money. He did this job much more shrewdly than I could have done. The maid, Dasha, also stayed. Those two got along nicely together.

Once he had come to the Theater, beaming. In six days two officers and about a dozen lancers had been in touch with him. He had helped them all. He had made friends with the janitor of the house, who was a Red, told him that he was organizing a Polish Communistic nucleus and that he had to do it secretly because all Poles were Whites on principle. He told me all this in an excited whisper in the corner of my dressing-room after the performance and I listened to him, slowly taking off my make-up as "Sir Toby Belch." "Why isn't it I who am doing all this?" I asked myself. "Because I can not any more. I don't care anything about any of it."

Now, inside the open door of my apartment, Watzek stood and looked embarrassed. "Ah—how are you, comrade!" he burst out in a loud voice. "Welcome, comrade artist! Come in—you're just in time for a feast, comrade!" All the time winking both eyes and nodding toward the dining-room.

I winked back that I understood, and greeted him in the best communal manner, "How've you been bumming along yourself, comrade?"

He smiled and led the way inside. The table in the

dining-room was covered with a white cloth, one of my best, and heaped up with food on plates and in paper; butter, cheese, red caviar, white bread, condensed milk, sugar and raspberry jam, all good things to eat that were already scarce. There was an old bottle of sorb-apple brandy, a delicacy usually reserved especially for ladies. A man in a military uniform held his knife and fork poised, a finicky little finger sticking out from the rest of his hand. Next to him were two more chairs and used plates. One must be Watzek's. Whose was the other? Dasha's?

Watzek spoke up, "Meet Comrade Smakoff—Comrade Boleslavski. I'll help Dasha with the tea." And he left the room.

I shook hands with Comrade Smakoff. He had the face of a bat; triangular, with a large bulging forehead and round black eyes. Never have I seen any one so polished up. His hair, long on the sides of the bald dome of his skull, was smoothed down with brilliantine and laid out to frame his forehead at exactly the right angle. His mouth was not bad, but it was spoiled by a thin mustache waxed to a needle point. An even tinge of powder lay on his closely shaved bluish cheeks.

He shook my hand with his finger-tips. "In time for a repast," he said hospitably, pointing to the table as a host. I knew that he must have provided the delicacies. "Our friend Dasha is short of charcoal——" His voice purred like a cat's. "I must supply her with the deficiency. For that reason, we could not have a samovar—she was compelled to boil water in a kettle. It is a poor makeshift, and naturally it spoils the tea. But such are the fortunes of a revolutionary. In the circumstances, one has to put up with them."

I took another chair and sat at the table. I wanted to get up again right away, as I did not feel in the least at

home. The presence of this stranger, who behaved in my house as if he owned it and treated me with flashy politeness, I did not mind,—during the last few years I had got used to making my home anywhere and with anybody. But I did resent his cocksureness, his knowing air, his attitude of superiority. For the moment he was a powerful and important person, so I had to be agreeable and careful.

"Which way did you come here, comrade?" he asked. I told him. "To-morrow it will be finished," he went on, cutting off my answer. "Stupid Whites!—Won't you try that cheese?—They are like scattered islands in a sea of Reds. There is no hope for them. Two regiments arrived yesterday from the front, ordered here to assist the Whites. Both turned Red to-day." He laughed and began the Toreador song from *Carmen*. Then he dropped it. "Let me make you a nice sandwich, comrade."

"Thanks," I said. "I don't feel like eating. I've been walking all night long. I saw things. I'd rather not talk. I wanted to hide somewhere—that's why I came home . . . but . . ."

"Sensitive soul of the artist," concluded Smakoff patronizingly. "Forget it. You are perfectly safe as long as I am here. You won't be molested." He offered me a cigarette and held the match. His hands were fragrant with Persian lilac; they were actually manicured. "Dasha tells me that you were always extremely 'comrade-like' to her." I shrugged my shoulders. "That you never considered her as a servant, and that you made her like one of the family. Action worthy of an artist! With a point of view like that, you are one of us, comrade. Enjoy a nice repast now and forget what is going on over there." He made an elegant sweeping gesture, pointing across the room beyond the windows. "Nothing to worry about. Nothing at all. . . . Eat!"

At this moment Dasha came in carrying a large kettle of boiling water and a smaller one of tea. She hesitated a second in the doorway, her china-blue eyes fixed on me. Watzek, behind her, held the door for her with his foot. In his hands he had a tray of hot meat pies.

"Ah! my beauty, put it down here," said Smakoff, and gallantly rose to his feet.

Still looking at me, Dasha came up to the table. She was a dainty girl, like a cheap doll at a peasants' fair. Now she moved stiffly, and it took her a long time to place the kettles on a tray. I saw Watzek nudging her secretly with his elbow. While Smakoff busied himself pouring the tea, she brought an extra glass over to me, stretched out her little ugly hand that had washed so many clothes and dishes, and said in her thin voice, "Good morning, comrade." Then as if asking forgiveness, she added quickly, "Please."

"Good morning, Dashenka," I said, making it as familiar as possible. I guessed then that Watzek had gone to the kitchen and had warned Dasha to behave as if she were on the best Communistic terms with me. She was a sweet girl, but she was not bright, and an instinctive servant; obedient, respectful, loyal. Though her face was pretty, with three freckles on its button nose, she had no personality at all. How Watzek had managed to make her understand that I, "the master," must be called "comrade," and that she must sit at the same table with me, I don't know.

Dasha meekly spoke another blasphemy, "A glass of tea, comrade!" This time she knew her lesson, she did not say "Please." She handed me the tea and continued to stand.

"Thanks, Dashenka," I said. "Do sit down and drink a glass yourself to keep me company." Dasha opened her mouth. I was sure she was going to say: "Oh, sir!" the way she usually did when I was nice to her. I had to think fast. "And say," I continued without giving her a chance

to produce a sound, "make me one of those cheese and sardine sandwiches I like so much."

"Yes, sir!" Dasha screamed, and began to cut the bread. "Dumb-bell," I thought, and looked at Smakoff. He had not heard her. He was teasing Watzek, but it seemed to me that behind his pseudo-elegant, laughing manner lurked real anger. Watzek was piling pies on his own plate.

"It took you a suspiciously long time to help Dasha with that kettle." He turned to her. "Was he whispering sugary promises to you again, my beauty?"

"I don't have to, Comrade Smakoff—don't have to," said Watzek, omitting all the consonants because his mouth was full of hot meat pie. "Dasha's heart belongs to me—without 'annexations and contributions.' You haven't a chance, comrade. Not a chance!" He packed the crumbling meat pie back into his mouth with the palm of his hand.

Dasha, her porcelain face blushing, looked at all three of us.

Smakoff was cutting a large slice of cheese and spreading an inch of red caviar on it. A thin silver bracelet with a charm dangled from his wrist and jingled against the plate. "That remains to be seen; doesn't it, Dasha?" He smiled with his upper lip only. "My, you're sweet, with those large eyes of yours. Have some jam, my little red apple." He turned to me. "Help yourself. Take some meat pies, comrade. I don't want them—a very vulgar food."

I took one and ate it mechanically.

Smakoff continued, "Now let's analyze the situation. You be the judge." Then he again turned to Watzek, "You, Comrade Cavalryman, are in a more advantageous position than I. You have been here enjoying the charms of Dasha for quite a while and I only arrived yesterday. I am the political commissioner of the Red Army in the district of

Arbat," he explained to me proudly. "The highest power at present in the whole district. My office is in the Police Precinct around the corner. It is too far for me to go home for meals so I have installed myself here. Comrade Dymba" (he called Watzek by his last name) "told me how you saved him from a White Hands officer to whom he was an orderly, and gave him hospitality and shelter. I'm glad to have made your acquaintance, comrade."

I looked at Watzek. His eyes laughed into mine.

Smakoff went on, "Therefore I decided it would give me pleasure to have my meals in a real comrade-like and"—he bowed to me jovially—"artistic household. My pleasure was doubled when I found what a lovely creature you have in your household, comrade." Again his upper lip smiled at Dasha and me. "But I'm afraid you'll lose her—oh, yes you will! There are very few women who can withstand my charms," he finished simply.

Watzek banged the floor with his boot. "That's a good one! My, that's a hot one! Give me that brandy, comrade rival. I want to drink to your defeat. Yes, comrade, to your defeat. This little girl here has already promised me her hand and heart. Tell him that, sweetheart. Tell him that. Don't be afraid—and we'll all drink to the commissioner's defeat."

Smakoff laughed noiselessly. "Women's promises are written on water. They disappear before they are finished. Do you want proof? Watch me. Little Dasha is going to give me a kiss right before your very eyes, comrade. Right before your eyes." He unbuttoned two buttons of his tunic and drew from his inner pocket a lady's gold watch on a long old-fashioned chain. "*Ein—zwei—drei—hocus-pocus—voilà!*" he exclaimed with the air of a magician. "That's for you, my sweet, and all I want for it—right now—is a kiss. Just one kiss." He bent over Dasha and

put his arm around the back of her chair. She shrank a little from him but her eyes were fascinated by the dangling shiny watch. It meant a treasure to her, lovelier than anything she had ever owned, than anything she had even dared to dream about. In the pause, the distant shooting suddenly became clear and distinct. Watzek drank his tea from his saucer, sipping loudly. Smakoff pursed his lips and squinted his eyes slyly at Dasha. She did not know what to do; my presence disturbed her.

The bell rang. Relieved, Dasha ran to open the door. A businesslike Red infantry soldier entered. In one hand he held a rifle, in the other a piece of paper. He looked tired and in a sort of half-sleepy state. His red eyelids blinked constantly and he rubbed them now and then with the back of the hand which held the paper. A couple of times while speaking, he stifled a yawn.

"Say, Comrade Commissioner, in house number 68, by Nikita's Gate, we took an apartment. Some shooting from the windows,—so we broke into the place. We found an officer with his family there—six or seven of them. And four cadets they were hiding. Do you want to see them? They surrendered. I have them down-stairs here on the street. Here are their names." He handed over a dirty scrap of paper scrawled with ten names.

Smakoff took the paper and looked casually at it. "Any weapons in the apartment?"

"The cadets had rifles; the officer only a service revolver," the soldier finished with a big yawn.

"Sit down, comrade, and have a glass of tea. Time is not a wolf—it won't run away into the woods," said Smakoff pleasantly, reciting the proverb and pointing to a free chair in the corner.

The soldier took it, carefully placed the rifle, hung his cap on the bayonet and brought the chair to the table.

“Anybody guarding the Whites?”

“Two of the Red army,” he said.

Dasha poured a glass of tea for him. “With lemon, comrade, or with milk?”

“I’ll take the first with lemon, thanks.” The soldier poured the tea out of the glass into the saucer, bit off a piece of sugar and began to blow on the tea to cool it.

Smakoff motioned Dasha to come and sit by him. Once more he picked up the watch and held it out toward her.

Watzek broke the silence. “A very bourgeois method of getting female favors.” A sip of tea. “‘Mercantile’ temptation!” Another sip of tea. “Far removed from Communistic ideals!”

Smakoff, his face a sudden red, put the watch on the table. “How dare you doubt my Communistic ideals!”

“I don’t doubt them—I just don’t like your methods.”

“You’re brutal.”

“Who told you so?”

“You have no elegance. You just squeeze Comrade Dasha into any corner of the room and make her kiss you with vulgar force.”

“It’s my right as a man.”

Smakoff laughed contemptuously. “You don’t know what a man is, my friend. You have been under bourgeois suppression long enough, but you didn’t learn anything from them. As a matter of fact, there was not much to learn except the art of being a man—or the art of being a woman. The bourgeoisie knew that very well indeed. They knew how to play the game of love, how to be ‘elegant’;—the most important, the most necessary feature for any human being in the world.”

“Are you a Communist, comrade?” I asked.

“Most certainly and definitely. That is why I know. I have studied the subject. I have read books. Why do

you think we're all fighting now? For the privilege of 'elegance' in the world for those of us who were denied it till now. We were peacocks who had no chance to spread our tails. Only those who had money could afford to be 'elegant,' to display their feathers, to win the females. When we are through with this crumbling culture and civilization, every male will be able to play up his 'elegance.' Not with money, though—there won't be any—but with brains, power, charm and understanding of feminine psychology. The only thing worth living for. This is my private unofficial opinion, mind you, just among friends in the line of a dispute, but I'm convinced that I am right. What do you think of that, comrade?" he asked me.

I answered sincerely, taking another meat pie, "I think we're fighting to fill up our bellies regularly, comrade."

"This from an artist? Ridiculous."

By now the soldier had finished his first glass of tea. He handed it to Dasha. "Give me this one with milk, please," he said in a businesslike manner, and again proceeded at once to cool it off.

Smakoff continued, "Such a small matter, food. People make so much fuss about it. The State will take care of all that. Just a question of even distribution. It is like having a name. Everybody has a name—everybody will have food. There are plenty of names and plenty of food. If that were the aim of our struggle I would not so much as lift my finger. But I know that it isn't."

"You talk too much, comrade," Watzek remarked sarcastically.

"That is how I can best display my elegance, and that's why I'll beat you. A rapier against a club." Smakoff straightened himself proudly and glanced toward Dasha. In his left hand he still held the paper with the names. He raised the other hand, the watch dangling from his fore-

finger. "I always longed to be an elegant. Before the revolution I was a regimental clerk. You know the rules: State uniform, no jewels, no perfume, no relaxation, no conversation, hair closely cropped, everything in strict accordance with the Articles of War. Such a life is unbearable to an esthete. I adore *Monte Cristo*. Petronius in *Quo Vadis*—have you read it? Arbiter Elegantiarum! Without such things, I am lost. It was the officers who used to have all that. Clean, shiny, fresh, in uniforms made to order. How could one compete with them? It wasn't fair. That's what I'll never forgive them. . . . They robbed me of the greatest pleasures in life—they robbed me of my 'peacock feathers.'" He began to read over the names, smoothing out the scrap of paper on the white table-cloth.

"I don't know," exclaimed Watzek again, wrinkling his face and shaking his head, "there must have been something wrong with you. Officer or no officer, when I got my girl she stood by me. You couldn't tear her away from me with wild horses. And I never had any 'peacock feathers' either."

Dasha giggled and Smakoff waved Watzek away impatiently. "It's exceedingly difficult to argue with you, comrade. But you," he turned to me, "you understand me, don't you?" Then again he leaned toward Dasha. "In her young soul she is an artist too. An artist of love, so to speak, waiting for her first creation—her first chef d'œuvre! And here is where I make my entrance. I display power, glamour, elegance, admiration—and Dasha is mine; aren't you, Dasha?"

Suddenly Dasha decided to produce a bit of thinking herself: "Love ain't a kitten—you can't order it around."

Smakoff patted her cheek adoringly, "Oh, Dashenka, but I can, with softness, with elegance. That is the lever which lifts not only hearts toward love, but the whole of humanity toward its uprisings."

We all looked at him; I with curiosity, Watzek with the shrewd expectation of a natural arguer who waits for his adversary to make a weak statement, and Dasha with awe toward a man who knew so many incomprehensible words, and could make her a present of a gold watch into the bargain.

The soldier finished his second glass of tea.

"Have a third one?" proposed Watzek casually.

"It'll do me good. A beneficent tea. A blessed beverage." He spoke while Dasha, as before, was pouring it into his glass from both kettles at once. "Put some jam in it, please." The soldier pointed with his finger. "Three spoonfuls will be enough. Thanks." Again he bent over his saucer.

Leaning over the bewildered Dasha, Smakoff sat with the air of a French marquis in a second-rate musical show, "The conquest of females, my dear, is nothing to me. In my presence you are as lost as the Whites down there in the streets." He leaned close to her and whispered, "Don't resist a conqueror, my love. . . . Don't try to stop Destiny. Don't hang on to the 'wheel of the Juggernaut.' . . ."

"Jes-us!" Dasha let her breath out. "Must you talk about such queer things? Why don't you drink your tea?"

Watzek almost burst with laughter. "Well, here she is, comrade! Come on and conquer her."

Dasha, ready to run away, cried out in her excitement, "Oh, for God's sake, not here—not before . . ." She looked at me in horror.

I soothed her. "Dasha, don't be foolish. Nobody is going to hurt you."

Smakoff continued, "Certainly not, my dear. It's all friendly talk—nothing else. I want to know your opinion. Tell me, whom do you like best, me or Comrade Dymba?"

"I . . . I . . . don't know. I like you both."

"Well, now; why do you like me?" asked Watzek.

The girl looked admiringly at him. "Because you are a war hero."

Watzek banged the table with his fists. "Good, sweetheart!" He grabbed her and kissed her on the mouth again and again, though she was squealing and trying to turn her head away.

Smakoff's face had suddenly become covered with red blotches. He dropped the watch on the table and went to the window, where he swayed back and forth from his toes to his heels. Shooting was going on somewhere near.

I interfered again. "Wait, Watzek—don't get excited. Let Dasha go. Maybe she doesn't want you to kiss her. You never asked her."

"A vulgar simpleton never does," said Smakoff without turning his head, continuing to sway.

Watzek dropped Dasha and bared his white teeth like a snarling dog. The old lancer awoke in him. "Say, you elegant comrade, what the hell? I didn't insult you. It's all in a friendly way. Do you want a fight?"

Smakoff turned around as if bitten; his waxed mustache shifted from side to side. "I made my remark generally. I was not thinking about an insult. I merely hate vulgarity and commonness. To grab a woman and kiss her is vulgar. Don't you understand that, comrade? The ill-bred officers used to do that to the maids. The really elegant ones made them fall in love with them."

"Well, there are no more officers here and there's no use bringing them into the argument. What the hell do you mean by calling me a vulgar simpleton? Come on, spit it out."

"Here, here, comrade! Don't be rude—don't swear. I can't bear it. Come on. To show you that I am inclined to be friendly, I'll give you some very well-meant advice. Don't

ever try to fight with me. . . . Don't ever . . .” He finished almost purring, but he was ready to scratch. And he had two guns in his belt.

Watzek got up and went close to him. “Swallow your own advice, comrade. I don't need it. When I want to fight, I fight before anybody has a chance to give me any advice. I hit first and listen to advice afterward—maybe.” He sat down next to Dasha again.

If they were to go on like this, Watzek would brain the commissioner, or the Elegant would shoot Watzek. I interrupted again, “Oh, come on, comrades. Nobody meant anything personal. Let's be friends. Pour brandy for all of us, Dasha. Let's forget who said what. Come on. In your hands, comrade!” I gave a glass to Smakoff and another to Watzek. “Take a sip, Dasha.”

Dasha hesitated, but drank her tumblerful. “Can I say something?” she asked, looking at us.

“Certainly . . . Yes . . . I wish you would,” we all said at once.

Dasha began, breathless with fright. “I like Comrade Smakoff too—because—because—he has such a pleasant odor—like perfume,” she finished, blushing.

These words gave Smakoff an immeasurable amount of pleasure. He ran his finger under his tight collar and moved his head sidewise, proudly.

“Are you through with your tea, comrade?” He addressed the soldier in a brisk tone.

“One more glass wouldn't be amiss, comrade, to rinse the guts out, so to speak.” The soldier smiled pleasantly. “Just plain, please. A very remarkable drink, plain tea. Thanks.”

Dasha emptied the kettle and went out, taking it with her into the kitchen.

“Well, let's ‘hurry slowly,’ comrade,” said Smakoff, his

eyes following Dasha. When she had disappeared behind the door, he picked up the paper with the names on it, and produced a fountain pen from his pocket. He shook it with a flourish to draw down the ink. Like a servant imitating a high dignitary, he began to write. I had a feeling that he had practised this gesture at night before a mirror and had never used it before. I looked at the paper. Across the ten names he had written, "Shoot all. Pol. Com. Joseph Smakoff." The signature was underlined with an elaborate spiral line. He handed the paper to the soldier who took it with one hand, the other still holding the saucer to his mouth. He sipped the last drop, placed the saucer on the table and put the empty glass on it, upside down as a sign that he was through. Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he said to all of us:

"Thanks humbly, comrades." The scrap of paper he stuck into the cuff of his overcoat, picked up his cap and rifle and went quickly off.

When Dasha came back and took her place next to Smakoff, he was all ready for her. He made a bow, a copy of the stage bow of some melodramatic hero, and began, affectedly, "Angel, I am charmed by you." Dasha giggled. "One kiss from your blossoming lips will make me your slave for life. Oh, do! Oh, do, heavenly creature, accept my gift." He took the watch in both hands, dropped on one knee and offered it. She took it. "And a kiss?" whispered Smakoff.

Dasha wiped her lips with her apron, threw a desperate glance at me and gave a kiss to Smakoff, who embraced her tenderly.

Watzek could not resist an angry grimace. "Doesn't he taste like a piece of soap?"

Smakoff was putting the chain of the watch around Dasha's neck.

She blushed like a poppy and continually repeated, "Thanks—oh, thanks—many thanks."

I got up and went to the window. A group of thirteen people stood in the middle of the street, five men, five women and three guards. The soldier who had drunk tea with us was holding a burning match in cupped hands. One of the prisoners, the only officer among them, was bending low, lighting a cigarette from it.

CHAPTER XIV

VALKA

WITH the same elegant spiral twist, Comrade Smakoff signed a pass for me when I told him that I had to get to the Studio at once. Following me to the door, Watzek whispered:

"Don't you worry, I'll keep an eye on everything. I know how to handle them. . . . It's better for you not to be here."

"Look out for yourself, Watzek. Drop that girl. What do you want with her?"

Watzek snarled, "That guy may be the emperor of all the Communists, but the day he sees her his girl, he'll be able to see the back of his own neck."

"Oh, forget them, Watzek. You've got to think about our own boys who might come here."

"Well, they won't come while this shooting is going on. As for later on—I managed to warn *you*, didn't I? Well, so long."

"God be with you."

Smakoff's pass was not questioned by any of the Red outposts I met on my way. One hour later, I arrived at the back entrance of the Studio. The first man I met was Gregor. He was bolting the heavy wooden door at the end of the entrance tunnel. With a grand-opera gesture, he broadly sang a greeting:

"Hostile whirlwinds
Are blowing abo-oo-ve us. . . ."

"I hope you split your tonsils, Greg. Must you yell that Socialist hymn?"

"What's wrong with it? Listen to that note:

"... are blowing abo-oo-ve us. . . ."

"Don't be a fool. If the Reds hear you they'll shoot you before you can close your trap."

"Can't a man even sing?"

"Sing any darn thing you please, but don't sing political songs."

"Even if I like the tune?"

He was teasing me, but he wasn't merely doing that. If he had felt like it, he would have yelled, "God guard the Czar," at that moment, loudly and dramatically. All his moods were expressed in singing, whistling, humming, or the strum of a guitar.

"What are you doing here?"

"I spent the night in the Studio. Called up my wife after the show. She's at home—my brother too. I tried to walk there but couldn't get through. So I came here."

"Anybody else around?"

"The whole gang. . . . Drifted in like cows into the shade."

"With you as a bull to lead them."

"I don't give a damn. I love vacations, and I think we're going to get a few good days of it. Too bad Faina [his wife] didn't want to come along to the Studio too. Afraid, she said. If she'd come, then I'd be all set."

For a fleeting second he became wistful, or rather, pensive. A dark thought trembled in his large brown eyes. The next moment we raced each other, three steps at a time, to the attic.

In my small room I found a dozen of our boys and girls who had come to the Studio since last night, through the shooting; leaving homes, relatives; risking arrest; giving

no thought to what they would eat or where they would sleep, all driven by an intuitive response to the Theater's silent call, "Stand by." For we could not abandon those boards which were our stage, and those flats of painted canvas which were our scenery. Or was it more than that? Was it that these symbolized stability, that these gave us something we could stand by and defend, something we understood without arguments and shouts?

The moment I saw my friends, smelled the faint, sweetly intoxicating odor of the theater and felt the vibration of the empty house and stage, a sharp clear thought flashed through me. For the first time in eighteen hours I got hold of myself. "This, this is, at last, what I'm looking for, what I haven't been able to find through all these hours. I'm going to stay here. I'm going to protect this place and these people. I belong here. I'm going to fight here. I'm going to stand up here—and stay till the end." All this quite simple and matter-of-fact, exactly as it had been during the war when I did not stop to think, "Is this right or wrong?" but did what lay before me to do. I knew that I could not, and did not want to, raise a finger in the street fight, but if some one should try to hurt anything here, I would fight in a wild fury.

I looked around. All of them seemed calm and composed, in spite of a sleepless night. Each of them had found peace here, just as I had.

Boris stood in the center of the small room, in clouds of cigarette smoke. From time to time he waved his hand, throwing the smoke up to the low ceiling, and the smoke disobediently oozed down like heavy incense. Boris was in the middle of a speech when I came in, and the rest nodded to me silently. I stood by the door.

"... this building is in a rather prominent spot. It is extraordinary that the Reds have not already placed

machine-guns on its roof. Or that the Whites haven't tried to enter it through the back."

"The streets in the back are in the hands of the Reds," I cut in.

"... All right. But the fighting switches from one point to another. What we have got to bear in mind is this: whatever happens, our place must survive intact and not be compromised by the presence of either one side or the other."

At once all turned toward Valka, small and undernourished, who stood awkwardly leaning against the wall. The only one of us who took an active part in politics, he was a full-fledged member of the Communistic Party. His prematurely old face was crinkled as if in pain, but he said, stuttering as he always did when self-conscious, "They'll trust us if we promise that we will guard the place ourselves and notify them if the Whites try to use it. That is what I was going to propose—that we become a sort of outpost."

Boris raised his voice: "We are not going to do any notifying. That would be taking a part in the fight. You, Valka, would notify the Reds. Somebody else would notify the Whites. We're not going to let anybody in—and we're not going to give any explanation to either side. If your allegiance to the party, Valka, does not allow you to agree to that,—leave us and go across the street right now. We will understand."

Valka's dark red-rimmed eyes looked at us anxiously. "I haven't received any orders from the party yet. I belong here as long as it's only a matter of the Studio. But if something outside comes up and the party learns that I didn't do my share, I'll go to the wall. Of course, if I get orders from the party, I'll have to obey."

"Make your choice, Valka—right now." Boris spoke

seriously and with that sincere authority which always made him our leader. "We ought to organize and we have lots to do. If you leave us, you can come back after all this is over. The rest of us have no political duties. All we have is our Studio. We'll understand you—and be with you afterward, whatever happens."

What Boris asked held no danger for us, but for Valka it was not only risky, it might be deadly. He stood for a while rubbing his forehead before he said calmly, without stuttering, "I'll stay here." Then he turned to me. "I want to ask you. I am a Communist. I always will be. You were an officer. Maybe you still are. Before that we were both actors here in this Studio. What are you going to do?"

I answered without hesitation, "I'll stay here, Valka, and do only what has to be done to protect this place and all of us. But, get this straight, if you get orders from your party to put machine-guns in this building, I'll have to fight you, too, Valka."

He smiled at me and said once more, "I'll stay here."

Since we had known him, two things had filled Valka's being to the brim, the Theater and Communism. He had served both with abandon, without expectation of reward or gratitude, with no hope of personal success in either one. He was a poor actor and knew it; this and his appearance caused humility to rise in him till he stuttered and felt actual physical pain. The only part he did at all well was that of Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*. Poor angular Valka, on two legs like pencils in tights, looked so funny trying to be rich, elegant and affected, that his appearance alone carried him through. "I'm portraying," he used to say happily, "the decaying offspring of the bourgeoisie."

He worked day and night. Nobody knew where he slept or when he ate. He had become a member of the Communist Party long before the war, while still a student at

the Moscow University. In the Theater he was an extra, in the Studio, one of us. He sat in the box office, he shifted scenery, he played parts; never letting down on the job, never tired, never offended by ridicule or huffy because chances passed him by. Outside the Theater, he used to go on errands from the party to factories, Workers' assemblies, meetings and lectures. He gathered literature smuggled from abroad and delivered it to its destination, at the risk of arrest and exile.

Once at a large secret meeting of Workers, a collection of money had been taken up, and two hats full of soiled, hard-earned currency lay on the table. Valka was counting it when a watcher shouted, "Police!" Instantly the lights went out. Some one standing ready had snapped off the main switch. When the lights came on again, the money has disappeared and Valka with it. Every person who sat at the table was searched minutely, right to the bare skin. No money. The police wrote down the names of every person in the hall. The speakers' table was arrested in a body and charged with organizing an illegal meeting. The ballroom, rented for the purpose, was closed and sealed.

Next morning a tiny, black, smudged figure appeared at the apartment of one of the leaders. The figure held a pair of old boots by the laces, swinging them around, as a shoemaker's apprentice would carry a pair of old brogans to be repaired. It was Valka. The instant the lights had gone out he grabbed the hats full of money and squeezed himself into the chimney of a large old-fashioned fireplace. There he had to stay all night long. He dared not budge from the chimney, much less from the locked and guarded building. In the morning he got a chance to sneak down to the cellar. There he looked around desperately until he found a pair of old shoes. Into these he stuffed the money. Carefully, he forced open a basement window and escaped. A cobbler

on an errand. After emptying the old shoes before his superior, he turned around, came to the Theater, washed and went to rehearsal. He said nothing about this adventure, even to his closest friends. We learned about it afterward from outsiders. Of the money he had rescued, he did not take a penny, even for his flimsy breakfast after the sleepless night in the drafty chimney. No one ever said thanks to him. He did not expect it.

He believed that the Theater was the greatest of all weapons of propaganda, and he studied every branch religiously. He seldom spoke of it, but when he did it was: "When the theater belongs to the Workers, I'll be able to teach them all about it." Or, "In the Workers' theater we won't have to worry about the box office." Or in still another way, "The Workers' theater won't need any audience—the audience will be on the stage and the stage in the audience—all in one." These words he said long before the war, when the rest of us were not even dreaming of a dictatorship of the Workers. A quarter of his meager pay he gave to the party.

Boris raised his voice again, "Now, remember, Valka—and all the rest of you, too,—no participation. No sides. If we save what we have here, our job will be done. . . . Let's get to work now."

After that we proceeded to organize our little community. The girls took over the problem of food. They made a list of what we had. Luckily the war hospital of the Moscow Art Theater occupied the back wing of the Studio and there was some food stored in it. Only a few lightly wounded men remained in our hospital. They played cards all day long, indifferent to what was going on outside. When Lyda, the official head nurse, bolted all the windows and ordered the patients to stay away from them, a soldier with a bandaged neck asked her:

"What's going on?"

"The Communists are fighting the Government."

"Uhm—hoo," said the wounded man. "Your hand—jack and ten." And continued to play cards as if two stray dogs were fighting in the next block. For the next two weeks, until everything was over, they did not stop playing cards. Lyda was rather grateful for this indifference. She had little trouble from the hospital,—as long as the men were fed and let alone. Her real problem was feeding the rest of us. Lyda, Sima and Hope went to the pantry to figure out the rations. With the wounded, they had to feed about twenty-five. And we might have to stay in the Studio for a week—maybe two.

Valka thought it would be longer than that. He told us that as street after street was taken by the Reds, Communist orders were to make a thorough search of each apartment, each yard, each attic and roof. There would be no quarter and no oversights, no danger that fighting would start up in that spot again.

It was ironical that Valka and I had, as our job, the guarding of the building. I was astonished to learn that Valka knew as much as I did, if not more, about guerrilla and city warfare. He knew where to place lookouts, what spots would be chosen as machine-gun nests and so on.

Valka had not gone to war. At the beginning he was too young. But when he was old enough to be drafted, he was prepared. Valka had a good set of healthy teeth, but if he could lose eleven of them he would be exempt. They must come out. No regular dentist would do it for fear of the law, but a Communist friend, a student at the Medical Faculty, pulled the necessary eleven teeth and obligingly jerked out six more to be on the safe side.

Afterward Valka came for the performance, as usual, but he could not speak a word and his substitute had to go

on instead. The girls were angry. "But so foolish, Valka—how could you—all your life long now you'll be without teeth. And your friend, he's worse than you are. He's butchered you. Look at the mess he's made. If we had him here we'd pull his teeth for him. His hair, too!"

Valka, his mouth open because he couldn't close it, answered, "No, he is a good Communist. Nobody else would do it for me. It's not his fault that he's studying gynecology. He doesn't know much about teeth. I'll be all right in a couple of weeks."

When the draft came to Valka's age, he was released on account of flat feet, general undernourishment and underweight. He did not even have a chance to open his mouth and show his empty gums. To his friends he said casually, "Too bad my teeth are gone. I'll have to put them back some way when the Workers' mobilization begins. But they won't be so stupid—they'll mobilize me anyhow."

All through the years of the war he worked secretly in the Workers' military sections, called "tens," "fifties," and "hundreds." Valka studied the strategy and tactics of city warfare and was instructor in a small factory, where he lectured to six people. He was eager to get four more so that he could present a full "ten," organized and taught by him, to the Central Committee. He taught his Workers the plan of the city, with all its arteries and approaches; also the attack and management of water-power, gas, telephone, post-office and arsenal buildings.

Now he walked with me along the roof of the building to see where we would need a guard at night. There was no danger from the adjoining roofs. They were all in the line of fire from the roof of the Governor's House and no one would try to occupy them. We decided that one guard in the back yard and another in the front of the house, by the telephone, would be enough. The telephone, probably

on the same main line as that in the Governor's House, was still working for incoming calls. But we could not call anybody on the outside. Members of the Theater from the far districts rang up to ask for news. We were careful to give non-committal answers.

By now the shooting had spread out all over the city. Wounded were being carried into the Governor's House. Lyda put on her nurse's uniform and went across the street to offer help. We had fifteen empty beds in our hospital. She came back bewildered and crying. The wounded Reds refused to be taken to what they considered a bourgeois hospital. If Lyda wanted to work for them, she must do it right there in the Governor's House, under the watchful eyes of a Red Sister of Mercy, a Communist. One of the wounded whispered that all doctors who had the rank of officers poisoned the Red wounded in the hospitals.

"Maddening stupidity," exclaimed Lyda, deeply insulted. "Besides, we haven't got a doctor. He can't get through the fighting zone. I'm alone."

"Well then, come here and work with us," said the Red nurse.

"But we have facilities—fifteen beds."

"We haven't enough trained people to watch you. We can't scatter them around," came the brusque answer. "Either come here or get out."

Lyda left in tears. She was an excellent nurse, and had succeeded with many desperate cases; she had no patience with amateurs who played at "war-time mercy." But it was the general psychology of the class struggle, more bitter, more terrifying than any war between nations. Probably the Whites acted the same way in the Workers' tenement districts. They also feared to be left alone and helpless amid the enemy.

Around four o'clock in the afternoon a great noise sprang

up outside. We all rushed either to the front door or to the windows. From Tver Street a mob of about four hundred people was being driven into the square. An embracing single file of shouting soldiers in torn unbuttoned uniforms, drove them like a herd of cattle; pushed and pulled and hit them with the butts of their rifles. They pricked them with their bayonets. They tripped the men. If the men fell, they kicked them, making them get up. The prisoners were in uniform, some police, some officers of the army, some cadets. Among them were about twenty women, two or three holding babies, and a dozen children besides. The whole crowd was running, their hands above their heads. From the Governor's House a new group of soldiers came out, all shouting madly. The trotting prisoners were not allowed to stop when they reached the square. They were driven around twice, trotting, and compelled to hold their arms up in the air all the time. The children cried, the women sobbed. The Reds had achieved a victory, had taken a mob of prisoners, and were losing their minds in rejoicing. Like everything else in those days, this was done with limitless rapture, so persistent and so long, that when everything was over, the victors lay in stupor for hours, not believing in their own existence. The soldiers, running, jumping, shouting, laughing and jeering at the prisoners, spent more energy boasting of their achievement than they had in capturing the Police Headquarters, which had capitulated for lack of food and hope.

The prisoners were lined up along the Studio building, right under our balcony. I stood with Valka, Boris and Michael, on the steps of the main entrance. Between us and the mob was a line of soldiers. Whenever a prisoner let his arms drop, they yelled wild curses and hit him in the back with their rifles. Now they faced the balcony of the Governor's House, which in a moment became filled with

men in civilian clothes and uniforms. It was the Central Committee and Staff from Red Headquarters. A man suddenly raised his hand. Voices began to shout, "Silence! Stop! Comrade Muraviev is talking! Hands up! Don't move!" The man on the balcony began to cry out each word so that it could be heard all over the square:

"Comrades, this is the beginning of the end of the bourgeoisie. Police Headquarters is in our hands!"

"Hurray!" from the crowd.

"You paid for it with your blood! The contemptible crowd that ran for protection to the bourgeois mercenaries have fallen into our hands! They are the prisoners of the proletariat!"

"Hurray!"

"Each one of them is a potential enemy. Don't make any mistake about that. Each one of them is ready to plunge a knife into a revolutionary back. The relentless march of the proletariat must be protected! Leave your prisoners now to the Committee, which is entrusted with full power of judgment and punishment. Go back and fight—until every rat's hole—every stronghold of the Whites—is cleared and made safe for the Government of the Workers! In the name of the Proletariat of the Universe, I thank you."

"Hurray—hurray!" louder and louder, the shouts. Few, though, of those who had brought the prisoners, went back and fought. Thousands of others replaced them. Those who had achieved victory wallowed in joy until exhausted.

Once more the tired prisoners began to drop their hands. They were forced at once to raise them again. The men on the balcony began to sing the *International*. The soldiers scurried in and out of the mob, knocking off the caps of those who did not want to take them off, or who were afraid to lower their arms. Then they began to separate the

prisoners. The cadets, former police and officers were plucked out first. Some of them proudly told who they were; some were beaten till they confessed; some claimed that they had been merely passers-by. This they tried to prove with papers, or silly arguments, or suggestions that a telephone call to their homes would show them innocent. All this with continuous shouting and feverish excitement.

Some of the women were the wives of policemen or clerks who lived in the buildings of Police Headquarters. These had been taken with their families. Women clung to their husbands' sleeves and argued in loud voices; cried and pleaded with the soldiers. They were treated as roughly as the men.

How different from the war,—all this! There, the skirmish over, no hate remained. Here, the building taken, the defenders killed, the wounded given coup de grace,—the victors continued to fight with the defenseless capitulated mass of prisoners.

The cadets were cut out first. They were all young; pale, teeth chattering, hands up in the air. That "hands up" business was an insane torture invented right on the spot in the ecstasy of victory. It had no sense in it. The raised and falling numb arms were like helpless symbols crying to heaven. The soldiers stood around, and the moment they saw a hand wilting, threw themselves on the man and forced him to lift it up again. Some of the cadets clasped their hands above their heads, not able to hold them up any longer without support.

The group of cadets, who were yanked out of the crowd, stood in solitude; their families, friends, relatives, were elsewhere. They stood by themselves and there was no one to support, to console or to argue for them. There were perhaps sixty of them, surrounded by a row of bayonets. Once in a while it opened up like a huge mouth full of teeth,

to swallow a new cadet. The cadets were picked out by a group of men, all civilians, who segregated the prisoners. This was the Committee appointed to handle the prisoners, the beginning, the germ of the future Cheka. The line of bayonets would break, and a boy, pushed with a blow of the butt or a kick of the boot, would fly into the tightly packed bunch of his comrades. Sometimes he would fall on the ground. One after another, like fish from a boat, they were pitched into one pile. They were silent, and so scared that they did not answer even with words.

The members of the Committee shouted, "All cadets, come out! Any more left? Better come out right now! Come out, mama's boys!"

Two young boys came out of the midst of the mob and marched over to the others with the desperation of childish courage. They almost trotted, as if hearing the bugle call for attention. And these two boys, tired, frightened, but erect and defiant, changed the spirit of all the cadets. One hand after another began to drop, and chattering teeth bit into lips to prevent their trembling. The soldiers yelled threateningly. More hands fell down. A few cadets, who were on the outside line, fell to the ground under the blows. Their comrades lifted them and pulled them inside the crowd. Young angry voices began to answer and curse. All arms dropped.

Another civilian bawled, "Inside with the pups! To the wall with them! Don't waste any time! March them inside—they haven't had enough!"

The soldiers began to herd the cadets ahead of them. At first they went slowly, but as they were pushed, they straightened out and became more and more orderly. At the end, they almost marched. They walked off, carrying the beaten ones, toward the Governor's House and into the walled garden.

The Committee continued to pick out the police and officers from the mob of prisoners. Nobody had come to the help of the cadets, but now the women raised a hysterical wail. They hung on to sleeves, they fell on their knees, they kissed the hands of the civilians and soldiers. Others tried to run away with their children but were pushed back. The noise was so strong and penetrating that no separate word could be distinguished. In the stockyards a herd of cattle, seized by a crushing fear, bawls numbly and desperately. But the herd of people there who kill the cattle herd is silent and sullen. Here two bawls raced against each other: the bawl of fear and that of triumph.

Suddenly from behind the wall of the Governor's House, desperately close, a machine-gun began to laugh. The cadets were shot, lined up in three rows against the wall. They fell one on top of the other. Two nights later I saw them all being piled on to one truck.

I looked at Michael. He was sobbing. I looked at Valka. He was as white as plaster and stood rigid, his fists clenched. Boris turned around and went inside. Near us the civilians of the Committee and the soldiers made an effort to free themselves from the women hanging to their hands. They were trying to reach a few gendarmes and policemen who stood motionless, with staring gaze, as if the whole thing did not concern them. It was fear, paralyzing fear. Their wives were crying and begging for them. I am sure if some one had asked these men who the women were, they would not have known how to answer. By a psychological paradox, they stood at attention. Those arrogant husky pillars of Monarchy, or Bourgeoisie, or Democracy, or Socialism—who could tell at that time what and whom they represented—stood petrified in front of the four civilians of the Committee. Civilians of that "foreign extraction," which they had always despised so utterly. Two of them were

Caucasians or Armenians; one obviously from the Baltic provinces, and one a Jew. The commander of the detachment of soldiers under their orders was a Russian war-time lieutenant, promoted from the ranks of sergeants during the shortage of officers.

The casualties among the officers in the Russian Imperial Army were second only to those among the French, so that many officers were exalted soldiers who naturally took the side of their own kin and supplied the nucleus of command for the future Red army. This Russian commander of the Infantry platoon was noisy, a loud kind of "Yes man." He was going after his duties, modeling himself on a provincial Bourbon or bulldog kind of colonel; shouting, swearing, exaggerating his orders; anything to show off his power and his servitude to his new bosses. He it was who began to pull and kick the women, trying to separate them from the policemen. He was especially annoyed with one woman who hung on to the sleeves of the Caucasian, and in a loud wail begged him not to shoot her husband. Her words were incoherent, like the clucking of a hen when a hawk steals her little ones.

"Your honor—God—God! What have we done? He is my husband—he'll be good—he'll pray to God for you on his knees for the rest of his life. He'll shoot anybody you tell him to. Leave him alone, your honor! Jesus—Mother of God—I'll die! Leave him! I'll die! Leave him! He didn't know what to do—they told him. . . . I haven't got anybody but him! Leave him, your honor, your bright honor! I'll roll at your feet—I'll kiss your feet! Christ—Christ—Christ . . ." Her words rose to a keen shriek. She did not stop for an instant.

You could not even tell which was her husband. Those men—were they dead already? The Caucasian, with a guttural voice and pronounced accent, tried to get rid of

the woman by shouting at her stupidly, "Don't interfere! Don't interfere! All power to the Councils! Why didn't he think before? You can't stop revolutionary justice. Take her away! Don't waste our time!"

The war-time lieutenant pulled his cap low over his broad face with its squinty eyes and clipped burnsides, handed his rifle to another soldier, spat on his palms and tried to drag the woman away. She gave a hollow broken scream. The lieutenant put his arm around her neck from behind and, choking her, began to pull her back. The other women went after the Committee, all on their knees. One of the gendarmes fainted and fell flat on the pavement. The others began to shift about as if just waking up.

In the flash of a second Valka jumped out to the lieutenant and the commissioners and childishly began to hammer them with his fist. "Stop it! Stop it! You can't beat people—you can't! I'm a Communist. We won't allow you to beat people!" His weak fists drummed on husky arms and his voice rang like a whistle.

One of the commissioners grabbed him and shook him by the shoulders. "Away with you, pup! Get the hell out of here or you'll go with them!"

"You have no right—I'm a Communist," Valka screamed so loud that he must have been heard all over the square. He put his trembling hand into his inside pocket and dragged out his most prized possession—his membership card in the Communist Party.

The commissioner looked at it. "Oh, so you are a Communist? Under arrest," he shouted strangely with a nasal intonation reminiscent of a lieutenant of the old Imperial Police. "Under arrest," he repeated. "To be taken before the Central Committee immediately," he ordered two soldiers.

Valka looked helplessly around. A commissioner stood

before him, his finger pointing toward the Governor's House, as if waiting for Valka to make his exit. A Napoleonic finger, this finger of the commissioner, bending up and down—up and down. His face was womanish, puffy, with blue eyes and bad teeth. He wore a black Fedora hat and brown overcoat with an astrakhan collar, on his sleeve a red band, and over his jacket, beneath the overcoat, a gun right in the middle of his stomach. Valka looked at him for a long while. Women moaned, gendarmes and policemen relaxed, and half whispering, tried to say something to the surrounding soldiers. The lieutenant came up to Valka and slavishly frisked him for weapons. The commissioners all looked at Valka's card.

I went up to him. "Valka, I'll go with you. I'll be a witness. We'll all go with you."

Valka shook his head. "I'm among people of my own faith. They can't touch me. Stay here. I don't need you. I don't need any witnesses. Please stay here. I'll be back." He turned to the commissioner. "My card."

The commissioner ignored him but said something to the lieutenant and handed him the card. The lieutenant gave a command, "Convoy—left about face—march!" They took Valka to the Governor's House.

The Committee ordered the prisoners to the Hotel Dresden across the square and followed them there. I was worried about Valka and went inside the hall of the Governor's House and waited there three or four hours. They would not let me go farther. All I could learn was that Valka had been taken before the Disciplinary Section of the Central Committee. About nine o'clock he came out.

"How is it? Did they let you go? What have they done to you?"

He was sulky and silent. "I'll tell you later," was all I could squeeze out of him.

When we came back we found dinner left for us; porridge, noodles and tea. Everybody else was up-stairs and Valka asked me not to say that he was back. He did not want to be seen. Slowly he swallowed a couple of spoons of porridge and carefully laid his spoon on the table. His face dropped on the palm of his hand, sobs forced themselves between painful words:

"They suspended my card for a month. It was as clean as a whistle for six years, and now when I thought I would be of real service, they've suspended it. They said if it had been a second offense they would have sent me to the wall. I wouldn't mind that, but to suspend me as a Communist—it's cruel." Like a child crying over a "D" on his report card, he sobbed and did not eat his dinner.

"Never mind, Valka," I said. "You'll stay here in the Studio and you'll be just as useful."

"Maybe," he said. "But I wanted to go out and fight."

"Then why, you God damned fool," I exploded, "did you interfere and prevent their choking that woman?"

"I don't know. I won't do it again, I'm sure. I guess I'm still a bad Communist. One has to have an iron hand, heart and head. I taught it to my Workers' unit myself, but to-day somehow, that woman yelling 'Your honor,'—I couldn't help it. I'm a bad Communist—a bad Communist." He kept repeating this between breaths of air and the lumps in his throat which were choking him.

"Go to bed, Valka. I'll stay up to-night. Don't argue with me. Go to bed. I couldn't sleep anyhow."

Finally he went to the hospital, and without taking off anything but his shoes, fell asleep in one of the unoccupied rooms. I told the others what had happened to Valka and how he felt.

Hope Bromley was reading Delacroix's *History of the French Revolution* from the Studio library. She listened

with attention. Then she said, in her usual supercilious manner, "I wonder if the French Revolution was anything like this? The books, even the best, don't say. You don't get that picture of it at all. I saw those women from the window. Now here in this book, all the women climbed the guillotine, smiling and proud. I'd give anything to learn if there were women crawling on their knees during the French Revolution like those we saw to-day. What do you think, Boris?"

"Probably there were women who crawled on their knees. And probably there were men who would not stand up and defend their wives and children . . ." He did not finish but began to smoke furiously as if trying to get rid of a hidden thought.

CHAPTER XV

VERA

THE night dragged slowly, a black hearse pulled by a single horse. The electric lights were not working, and we were saving the few candles we found in the property room. With my eyes open to the darkness, I sat in my cubbyhole on the narrow wooden bed which belonged in the third act of *The Wreck of Hope*. I knew it was gaudily painted. Paul and I had drawn its flowery pattern for the Studio's first performance. Now the bed was mobilized like the rest of us; it was on duty.

I was the only one not asleep. "I'll try not to wake Valka," I thought. "I can stick it out till morning." Leaning against the wall, I gave myself up to the slow creeping of time, silence and darkness. I counted the shots and tried to guess where they came from. "From Peter Street. One—three—six—rattle; that's from the Kremlin. One—two—rattle; Tver Boulevard. . . ." A long silence. More shots. Single. Far away. The sound of marching boots. "Another lot from the Governor's House. Wonder where they're going? How many'll come back? Who are they? . . . Not singing and shouting . . . must be tired. . . ." The thumping steps faded out. Silence again. Heavy slow-flowing silence.

I was wide awake. Earlier in the evening while I was waiting for Valka at Red Headquarters, I wanted to lie down on the marble floor and go to sleep. My head felt like a melon bending down its stem, and my eyelids fluttered desperately. The constant noise and jabbering had dulled

itself to a monotony that made no dent on my nerves, yet now silence had me wide awake, held me in its grip and sent shivers along my spine. I needed this silence. I drank it in like oxygen. I could almost smell its invigorating odor. It did not enter into me all at once, and it was not complete. There were sounds in the silence, but each of them emphasized a high-pitched, vibrating noiselessness. "Vibrations," I thought. "So many billions in a mineral in a fraction of a second. Liquids—much more. Gases—still more. Colors, sounds, odors, a long ribbon of figures and zeroes. Atoms, ether, electrons. . . . How get all that? Measure it and explain? But it must be true. I feel the vibrations of this pitch black around me. I feel the sound,—a long faint whistle, of the world spinning somewhere."

Close by, more finite sounds; creaking boards; a miserable mouse between the beams; shuffling of many leather soles on the pavement; snoring in the next room; the cold night air brushing the thin covering of the roof; trembling of the window-panes; all of them like the complementary colors in the spectrum, ever present, never noticed, bordering in between, never mixing, never important by themselves. Just marking the time, the blackness and the hush. How long a time? I don't know.

An explosion reverberated somewhere on the outskirts, trying to shatter the lull to pieces. It did not succeed. The thick walls shuddered lazily, shaking off the echoes, and the night continued to wind its black thread around me.

"What time is it?" I took out my watch, but I could not see the dial. I listened, but it had stopped. I shook it. A faint tick-tack. Then it stopped again. I wound it up. Gaily it started to race, with its metallic, ringing heart beats, through space. It filled the whole room with its ring. I clutched it to my ear, eagerly listening, as if it were a song of life, as if some one were telling me, "You are alive—"

time goes—seconds pile up—minutes—hours—before they plunge into oblivion. What for? Just to prove to you that you're alive, that your being continues to function, to live."

I got up. "I must make the rounds. Let Valka sleep. He needs it, after his mess of a day. I'd better sleep all day to-morrow. The less I see of what goes on, the better." As I opened the door and crept out, tiptoeing, to the narrow balcony which ran around three sides of the stage two stories below I heard a whisper and stopped dead in my tracks. I lay on the floor and stuck my head beyond the railing, looking down. The voices came from the first row of seats, not more than three feet from the stage. The faint light of a night sky, reflected from the white walls of the back yard, oozed in through the large window and fell on two vague figures. I was ready to call to them when I heard a young masculine voice saying slowly, in hushed words:

"The North Sea belongs to the gulls. Millions of them. It is cold and inhospitable, but the birds seem to love it. When a ship cuts the thick gray water, they are always around the stern and bow, no matter how far from shore."

The voice slipped into the shadows. A girl's voice came in then, low, but stage taught, so that I could make out the words, "Tell me more about the birds. Don't they mind the wind?"

I was eavesdropping—not nice, but—oh, well . . . I had listened at first because it was my business that night to watch out for unexpected voices. The wooing tones of the man told me now that this was no business of mine, but it was a drama and I wanted to know what would come next. Besides, there was a pathetic quality as if he were playing a part, sincere, with abandon, and yet a part. So I listened.

"No, they don't mind a simple wind. It takes a gale to

sweep them away. You don't need a barometer. Before a storm they fly low, close to the waves, pointing their beaks with the storm. In calm weather they circle around the ship as if teasing it, as if making fun of all the speed it can make. When you see them far off in the spring, they look like falling snow. They fly in immense flocks over schools of fish and endlessly drop on the surface and fly up again, like white rockets turned upside down. If the boat cuts through the flock, they drop silver fish on the deck. They are so heavy with food that sometimes they fall and can not rise from the deck up into the air again. You can catch them with bare hands and throw them high up. Once in the air, they screech gratefully, spread their wings, circle around and dive again for another fish."

"And did you ever throw them up in the air like that?"

"I did—many times."

"Oh, how I envy you! How I'd love to be able to throw birds up into the air one after another—dozens of them. To play ball with them and see them spin in the blue. Do you know that I still go to the Shrewd Market on the twenty-fifth of March and spend all my money releasing the birds?"

"Do you really?"

"I do. I adore it. The market so crowded and all the people and the children buying the birds. I hold my breath every time some one opens a cage door and lets the frightened little thing out. When it flutters and flies away I always join in the cheers. I wait for it eagerly from year to year. Everybody laughs at me."

The other shadow's voice trembled: "I wouldn't laugh at you. The twenty-fifth of March—that's the greatest holiday of all. 'Birds don't build their nests on that day and girls don't braid their hair.' Do you know the legend about the releasing of birds on that day?"

"No, tell me—please."

I heard a stirring as though the man were settling himself to tell his story.

"Once upon a time there was a jobless fool of a clown in Moscow. He was old and penniless, and his daughter was sick. On the twenty-fifth of March he took all he had left, a trained pet bird, and carried it to the market-place. There, with a prayer to the Virgin Mary, he went up to a rich man and, for a few pieces of silver, offered to let him release the bird. The rich man liked the notion, and the clown stood by with tears in his eyes as the customer opened the door of the cage, gently took out the bird and threw it high in the air, saying sanctimoniously, 'To the glory of the Mother of God, the Holy Virgin, the Immaculate Conception, the Archangel Gabriel and the Dove of the Annunciation. Fly free, God's creature. Amen!'"

The teller told the tale as though reciting poetry.

"The clown felt like Judas with his pieces of silver clutched in one hand and the empty cage in the other. His head bent low, he ran a few hundred steps. Suddenly 'Tweet-tweet,' and the bird was sitting on his shoulder." Here the man imitated with skill the tremolo whistling of the bird. He almost put the meaning of words into the whistle. "'Tweet-tweet,' again, and the bird hopped down his sleeve and went straight into the cage. 'Tweet-tweet,' the bird whistled happily. 'Oh, my darling—my darling little one,' the clown cried with joy, closing the door of the cage. Another customer came. The clown sold the bird again. And again and again. A hundred times that day. He came home a rich man, his bird still in his cage, his hands full of food, money in his pocket jingling merrily. He found his daughter feeling better. He went down on his knees, and he and his daughter and the bird—all three—said another prayer to the Virgin Mary, thanking her for the miracle

of that day." He whistled again, imitating the bird's prayer. There was the shade of a smile in the tremolo of his whistling.

The girl laughed like a child. "Oh, I love it! I love that story. I'd like to be with birds. I would understand them. I'm tired of listening to people and words—people's words. Always the same over and over. Listening is a gift, a precious gift given to us to discover new, never before uttered sounds. To listen as animals do, every sound a new world. But we know all the sounds. We understand all the words. It's a bore. Now when you tell stories, there are no words in them. I never hear them. I discover things while you unfold them."

"I'm sorry you haven't heard me all this time I've been speaking to you. . . . I was trying to say something besides the story."

"I'll try from now on. Go on. Tell me more."

I changed my position and sat leaning comfortably against the wall. The flats of scenery and the balcony rail were in front of me. Through its cut-outs I saw the two like a faint shadow picture. They could not see me.

"I adore listening to you," the woman's voice went on, young and clear. "I probably shan't see the Shrewd Market again soon. I have a feeling about it. As if a dark night has descended on us and will never end. I couldn't sleep. I'm so sure that there will be so much time to sleep, to slumber, to live in a twilight, that it's no use doing it now. If I were a queen, I should chain you to my chair and make you tell me stories day and night, day and night."

"I wouldn't let you chain me to your chair, but unchained, I'd never move from it. And I would tell you all the stories I know. I would invent more and more of them for you."

There was a pause. Both of them sat so quietly, it seemed to me that their breath blended into one. Then

the teller began again, quietly at first. As he went on, his voice changed almost to a kind of singsong. He spaced his voice between the words and therefore each one of them became deep and important.

"I love you. I love you so much that sometimes I feel the blood streaming into my heart and pounding its walls, calling for you. My fingers get cold and numb. When you're not near me, it's hard not to scream your name. As if I would drop dead without you. I love you. I love you. . . ."

A long pause. I heard my own heart-beats. I was caught. Before I could make up my mind what to do, a string of shots tapped on all the window-panes and kept on for a long time. A tender silver laugh floated into the darkness all over the space. The shots became louder. The laugh stopped.

The girl's voice, low as it was, filled all the space where the laughter had been a minute before. "This shooting—I would give my life to stop it. Is there nothing anybody can do? It's the same people who release the birds, the same people killing one another."

"Did you hear what I said to you a minute ago?" the man's voice sounded sad and deep.

"I heard you," she answered simply. Her shadow got up and went to the window. His followed, and both stood looking down into the yard.

"How ugly this back yard is," the girl said. "Insides of humanity—dirt—dead gray walls—blind windows. Ladders like worms climbing along the cracked walls. That slime down below."

The man's voice interrupted her. There was something in it that was like a dog's eyes when he looks at his master.

"You torture me. I came here only to be near you. You're cruel. You don't answer me. Do you realize that

I belong down there where the shots are coming from? That I'm an officer too? That I have convictions I ought to stand by? I've given up everything, everything, to be near you. I became an actor because you are in the theater. I dropped the war the minute the revolution broke because I could not stand being away from you. I came here to take care of you, to see that nothing happened to you. Still you don't answer. How else can I tell you about my love? How else can I make you understand?"

"I understand."

"I have known you now for years and yet I don't know you. You are like a river's shore when a boat slides along it. I see it, but I haven't the slightest idea what's beyond it. The more beauty is in the shore itself, the less one knows what lies between it and the horizon. Like that, your beauty guards the spirit behind it."

The girl moved impatiently.

"Wait—wait. You don't like me to say this because you are a nun. . . ."

"A nun?" she asked, weighing the word.

"You live cloistered in your bedroom here in the Studio. Who else uses her bedroom for her dressing-room? Who else puts on her make-up in her bedroom and then descends the stairs to the stage? You are a nun coming down from her cell to mass."

"I wish I were a nun." She turned away from the window and looked up into his face. "Tell me another story."

The man's voice dropped into a heavier note. "You want to hear unreal stories from me. You don't want to hear about my love which is true. Your eyes are on the sky, you don't see what's under your feet. You are no part of this world. And yet you feel the slightest mood in any one of us. Why don't you answer me?"

"But you know I don't like to speak; I love to listen."

“Yes, with your eyes wide open and your mouth tight shut. You enjoy life in solitude. You waste your soul—you waste your beauty. You don’t even seem to know how lovely you are. Have you no pride in your own beauty?”

When he spoke again, I knew from the tone of his voice that she had only shaken her head.

“No, you are just the same whether you are with men or with women. You are cold and hard. Like marble. Greek marble.”

She protested, “But I don’t think I’m cold or hard.”

“No,” he said, “you’re not cold, you’re kind. You never refuse to help. You think about others, but you do not think about yourself.”

“I do,” she said insistently.

“You don’t, dearest. Right now you don’t want to talk about yourself. You don’t want to tell me what’s going on in your heart. That’s all I want to know. But you push me aside. You don’t care. Well, you pushed aside the Emperor’s gift the same way. Do you remember?” he said. “Those little gifts for that special performance the Emperor gave us five years ago? Every one of us was pleased, maybe rather vain, even the Socialists among us. But what did you do with your brooch? You didn’t even wear it.”

“Oh, it didn’t suit my dress,” she laughed.

“That’s just it. It didn’t suit your dress! The rest of us paraded ours. Sometimes you seem not human.”

“It is true I do not like real things. Chekhov, to me, is too personal. *Midsummer Night’s Dream*—*The Tempest*—*The Snow Maiden*—those I could live in for ever. All my good parts are unreal. Isadora Duncan was unreal—fleeting. I loved her. I love clouds, music, everything that does not stay, but flashes for a while and disappears into nowhere.”

He bent his head back and spoke to himself as if he were

a nightingale, singing, oblivious to the world. "I love you—I love you—I love . . ."

She leaned away from him on the window-sill. "Don't. Please, dearest, don't."

He jerked his head and moved his face close to hers. "Could you love me, darling? Could you—just a little bit?" Pleading and longing, the man stamped the words with a true ring on the darkness.

Firmly and softly she said, "No."

He pressed his head to the window-pane.

"I don't think it is in me to love any man. I am sorry if I hurt you. I do like you. I love to be with you and hear you talk. I could listen endlessly to your tales about birds and seas and foreign lands. But when you tell me about your love, I want to run away from you—to run as fast as I can. I don't know why it makes me feel so. I'm afraid of love. I don't know what it is. I have no desires. I can't attach myself to anything. Sometimes I think I don't know what sex is. I don't seem to have any. When you talk to me about birds, I could follow you to the end of my days. When you talk of love, you are just a shell to me. I'm sorry if I hurt you. Please don't start that again."

Silence fell between the two. I thought, "Here in the theater we take every love scene to pieces. No way for us to play a love scene in actual life. All we do is to take a girl's hand and squeeze her fingers. Words are all used up on the stage where they are important. There are no words left for life. If we use them they sound false and borrowed. Still, those two down below are playing the most beautiful love scene I've ever seen."

Again she raised her voice. "Now you are silent. Try to understand. I value in you or in any other human being only the amount of sky you bring down. What else do you

want? Do you want to eat breakfast with me? Do you want to have your meals with me? You can do that anyhow. To sleep with me? I can not conquer my horror before that simple thing. I'm not afraid or small-townish or moral, nor do I fear disappointment. It is just plain horror to me. I can not explain it to you. The moment you say that you love me, that you want me to love you, it is bondage. That's what it is—that's the horror that makes me cringe. I have thought about it many times for many years, and I've always been afraid of that. If you sleep at somebody's side at night, it means bondage by day. The moment I say 'I love you,' I have to say, 'I belong to you.' If I loved some one now, I couldn't be sitting here alone, talking with you. You wouldn't allow it yourself. Would you? But what's wrong with it? Love is a crude state of emotions and relations. Its only perfect form is on the stage. We control it there. There it is beautiful. It is defined in time and space, like everything that is beautiful. We can't do it in life. It's just impossible. . . . Darling, darling—what is the matter with you? A big man like you."

He was probably crying. She took his head and turned it to her. His voice changed to that of a male pretending to be so weak and small and tender that a woman can do anything she wants with him. Then he said in the lowest of tones, "I can hear—I can sense love in your words, in your fingers, and yet I can not convince you."

She began to laugh. Again that low-toned silver laugh charged with vitality, as if it were a scream. She quickly moved away from him and went out of the house into the lobby. I tiptoed down the ladder to the stage and sat in the first row, almost on the chairs they had left. Again, unseen and unsuspected, I watched them. She sat in the window overlooking the square, her knees under her chin, arms around them, head thrown back. He stood in front of her

like a Harlequin, with legs crossed, and arms akimbo, his head bent low, watching her.

The light behind them was rising slowly. Or was it a gray mist? I could not yet see the Hotel Dresden across the square. But there was a hint of its contours as if blotted out, like an etching on the reverse side of the paper.

The man straightened up. "Well, if stories are all you want from me, you shall have them. As long as I can be with you . . ."

He paused a little and then began tenderly, as if lulling a child to sleep; yet not quite that, because a live and trembling love tinted all his words with a glowing heat.

"In those days, Vizar, wise and old, ruled the city of Bagdad. Courageous and shrewd, he defended his domain from the heathen who worshiped the Son of a Carpenter and wore black crosses on their white capes. He defended the city from Persians who worshiped the sun which has no mercy, and from Chinese who worshiped a philosopher. But his own people had become negligent in their faith. They did not stop at the first call of the muezzin and fall down on their faces into the dust. And they did not bow their countless heads in silent reverence when the new moon appeared above the highest blue dome. Old Vizar was grieved. He called his three chief advisers and consulted with them. The first of these was old Karagar, chief of guards and police, a fiery little man covered with scars. The second, not less old, but much wiser, Saron, the chief judge of all the courts, a white-bearded, enormous man with stone-like features and half-closed eyes, as if he were justice itself. And, wisest of all, the hundred-year-old uncle of Vizar, the venerable Nazdek, who had fought in his youth under the Prophet himself.

"All three blamed a dancing girl who had come from nowhere. She strolled, alone and free, along all the streets

and markets. She did not wear the veil prescribed by the Prophet, she had no house, she belonged to nobody and obeyed no one. 'Her dress is immodest and torn,' they said, 'flashing her skin before the eyes of all the true sons of Mohammed as she passes by. She makes her living by dancing openly,—immodest, lewd dances. She cares not what time of day or night, when she sees a number of people gathered together she strikes her little drum with swift fingers and dances. Dances right in the street. Before the eyes of any man.' "

The shadowy girl in the window sat stiff, facing the man as if hypnotized. His steady modulated voice seemed to drag her to him. He backed a few steps away and began to gesticulate with the flexible gestures of well-trained hands. More than ever he resembled Harlequin. His voice rose a trifle.

" 'The girl commands a devil's charm,' Old Saron thundered. 'The faithful stop in their tracks and watch her. They no longer hear the voice of the muezzin. They forget the time of sunrise and sunset. They forget the time of the new moon. They follow her in crowds and feed their eyes on her sinful beauty, as if they had not dozens of wives in their harems, willing and lawful wives, theirs for a nod.'

" 'What is the world coming to? What is the world coming to?' sighed the hundred-year-old Nazdek."

" 'And then what happened?' " The girl's voice was urgent.

" 'I want that dancing girl brought before me,' said wise Vizar, playing with his beard.

" 'There is no wisdom like Allah's and no prophet like Mohammed,' answered the advisers.

"The dancing girl was brought into the greatest room of the palace. On the alabaster floor and among the columns of porphyry she stood in front of the four men, Vizar and his three councilors. A long silence. Then she smiled and

drummed slightly on her tiny drum. 'Do you want me to dance for you?' she asked demurely."

The listening girl broke into the story with her low peal of laughter. "I can see her. I can see her plainly standing before the four wise men. I can see how they wrinkle their brows and look at her in disgust."

"They do, and they scorn her with dignity. 'Do not open your mouth, O Harlot of Sin, before you learn your fate!'

" 'Wisdom has spoken, my daughter,' said Vizar. 'You must first learn your fate. Dance before us. Do your best, and if your poor dress is in your way, take it off.' The three councilors collapsed on their divans with horror."

I heard the soft tender clapping of the girl's hands. Harlequin, warmed up with his own story, began to imitate the voices of old men.

" 'Not before my eyes, O Son of Wisdom!'

" 'I could not wash away that sin to the end of my days, O Vizar!'

" 'I've lived a hundred years and never heard of anything so disgusting!'

"But Vizar raised his hand quietly. 'How are you to judge a sin if you don't know it? Proceed, my daughter.'

"The girl began her dance, slowly at first, stepping carefully on the slippery pink alabaster, holding her little drum in front of her and beating time in gentle rolls. She seemed to race after it. As if it were a flock of humming-birds, and she set to catch one of them, she circled the floor."

The shadow of the girl got up in the large, dark, gray lobby and began to move, half-rhythmically following Harlequin's words. He changed their rhythm, describing the dance of his story. He threw words at her as a conductor throws the beats of his baton to the orchestra. He held outstretched hands spread out and moved them after her while she, in swift movements faithfully interpreted all

his words. The lobby was large. The girl was at the other end of it and I could no longer see her. I heard the shuffling of feet and I saw the taut lean figure of the man, bending and swaying almost with musical precision. His words followed the improvised measures.

"The girl swings into the center of the place. With a quick movement of her hands, she turns the drum around her, throws it in the air, catches it, holds it in back of her, then to each side. She turns around, bending low to the ground. She covers her face with her forearms and slowly moves her hips from side to side. Her small feet flutter as if she is going to rise from the floor and fly away. Faster and faster she whirls and runs and darts back again. She stamps her feet. The beats of the drum come stronger and stronger, until she stops suddenly, her arms outstretched, and languidly turns only her head around, as if giving herself up to an unknown force. Vizar gets up and watches her, standing. His three councilors fork their fingers before their faces, trying to get rid of the sin which is laying hold of them. As if struck by lightning, the girl falls on her knees, strikes her drum furiously, jumps up and begins to whirl and wing her way in broad strides. She is a white and rosy bird skimming the place. One more turn. One more jump. Slower, slower. She stops near a column of porphyry and, breathing heavily, begins to take off her clothes. The veil first. Then the belt. Then the shirt. . . . She does it slowly, as if performing a ritual of sacrifice, as if laying an offering on an altar. She stands naked before her judges."

The Harlequin knelt on the floor. His voice became excited and husky.

"Vizar looked at the dancing girl for a long time, then without turning his head, he asked, 'What is your judgment, O Wells of Wisdom?'

“The Chief of the Guards spoke first, ‘She should be taken as she is and tied to the highest punishment pillar in the middle of the market-place. She should be left there as an example to all the faithful.’

“Then the Chief Judge spoke, ‘After three days of exposure, she should be burned at the stake on slow but fiery and consuming flames.’

“And the hundred-year-old Nazdek spoke last, his eyes closed, ‘She ought to be stoned first.’

“Vizar bent his head. The dancing girl looked at him as if not understanding that all those cruel things were meant for her. For a long time Vizar stood, deep in thought. At last he spoke. ‘Words of wisdom are no good unless they are fulfilled. Your verdict, my friends, shall be executed. I’ll see to it that it is done scrupulously. With these precious stones I’ll stone you first, my child.’ Vizar tore one diamond after another from his tunic, one emerald after another from his turban and belt. He took pearls from his sleeves and sapphires from his fingers and threw them all at the girl.”

All this the teller performed in pantomime, with abandon, as if tearing his own eyes out. His voice was flamingly sorrowful.

“The girl stretched her arms to Vizar and caught the stones in the air as he flung them. Finally Vizar threw his priceless cape over her shoulder and drew her to him. ‘With the fiery, slow, consuming flames of my passion I shall burn you from now on, until you turn to ashes. I, Vizar the Wise, will be your punishing pillar. I’ll be the flames. Mine will be the hand which starts the fire.’ He drew her still closer to him. ‘I am my people and my people is I. You shall be exposed naked to my eyes, not in the market-place, no, and not for three days indeed, but for always—for always, my child.’ Vizar looked long into the girl’s eyes and then turned to his advisers. ‘Is your verdict fulfilled in its integrity, O

wise men?' But the wise men had disappeared. Disappeared for ever. Vizar never heard from them again and never asked for them either. From the dancing girl he got all the advice he wanted, to the end of his days."

The man finished and dropped again to his knees, with his head down, like a singer after the song is finished, or like a beggar who has received his alms.

The window-panes rumbled. The roar of voices outside suddenly sprang up and filled the room. The fairy-tale was over. The gray day had arrived and made everything visible. The shadows fled; there were no Harlequin and mysterious maiden. I had to make my presence known. I ran back-stage and shouted, "Gily, Gily—what is it?" Then I turned around and entered the lobby. Vera and Gily were there. Vera I knew well.

Gily I knew slightly, as he had been at the Studio only a little while before the war, playing extra parts. He was a Lithuanian, tall and dark. His long face had a sort of childish seriousness, pretending to be grown-up. He was rather affected, holding the corners of his mouth down, looking at the world from under his eyelids. He wanted much to play heroes, but according to our training he had to scrub floors first. This he did with an air of "I'll show you when I get my chance." After he was caught sweeping the stage and reciting "to be or not to be," some one called him a "Hamlet with a broom." Before the war Gily had been a sailor and had seen something of the world. He had a gift for story-telling, and I was not sorry that I listened to him.

All three of us ran to the window. The rumbling and shouting grew louder, thundering from all sides.

We looked through the window-panes. Batteries of field artillery were rolling in fighting order into the square, hammering without mercy on the cobbles. The men, the horses,

the guns and ammunition boxes were decorated with red calico which looked brown and decayed in the gray light. The field pieces were surrounded by a countless mob of soldiers and Red army workers, cheering a welcome and wildly waving hats, flags, rifles. From the side-street, the mob poured endlessly, and each batch seemed to yell louder and harder. The artillery, after two days and nights of meetings and arguments, had finally joined the Reds. Half of their officers they had shot, the other half they forced, at the points of guns, to tear away their epaulets and replace them with the Red calico. Now they had come to the Communist Headquarters to proclaim their allegiance. They circled the square. Trotting of horses, banging of wheels on stone and clanging of steel on steel, all entwined together and turned in a merciless dance. The guns jumped and slid at the corners. The horses laid their ears low and jerked their heads. The flags, like pendulums, swayed back and forth. Endless clamor reigned above all, shattering the eardrums and splitting the brain.

The silence was over. The night was over. Another day had begun.

Two days later Vera learned that the part of the city in which her mother lived was a center of savage fighting. The houses were taken and retaken, helpless dice in the fight. She wanted to go and take care of her mother, but we would not let her do so. Gily went instead, and promised her that he would do whatever he could, and anyhow, he would bring news of her. Six hours later they brought him back on a stretcher, unconscious, shot through the upper part of his chest. It took him eight weeks to recover. When the Reds picked him up he begged them to take him to our hospital. They had seen him being wounded, and knew that he wasn't fighting. The card of an actor of the Studio was in his

pocket and so they brought him home to us. In his hand he clutched a little note from Vera's mother:

“My dear Girl: I'm all right. Safe in the house of my friends the R's, which is not in the fighting zone. Take care of yourself. God bless you. And thank the nice young man who came and brought me news of you. Your loving Mother.”

Through the days and nights while Gily was unconscious, Vera sat by his bed. In his delirium Gily talked about white birds, gray thick waves of the North Sea, and the ancient town of Bagdad with the blue-tiled domes.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BABIES AND THE CANNON

ON THE day when the artillerymen thundered down to Red Headquarters, the Whites had plenty of rifles, but they were left with only two field pieces. They held the Telephone Building, part of the Kremlin, the old arsenal, the Alexander Infantry Cadet School, the University. Many of the avenues to the center of the town were still theirs, but the most important, Tver Street, which connected the Governor's House with the artillery barracks at Chodynka, a mile and a half outside Moscow, they lost when the artillery chose the Red. From the suburbs, crowds of Workers poured after the guns, swelling the Red forces and pushing the Whites farther and farther into the outskirts.

This we heard as we mixed with the turgid torrent which filled the square to the brim. The Governor's House could hold no more. Every window was so full of men that it looked as though they would burst the frames. The garden and back yard beyond were regular camps of an army on the move. Every few minutes an armed soldier or sub-lieutenant with red scarf in place of ripped-off insignia, ran out of the house and yelled, "A platoon for Nikita's Gate," or "Ten men on patrol duty," or "Four platoons to attack the Manege." Sometimes two or three called at once. The soldiers got up and strolled to the shouting commander, negligently falling into marching formation. They did not take the calls in any order. All were volunteers and they answered only if they wanted to, but most of them jumped up readily, especially the Workers. In civilian clothes hung

with weapons, they were the back-bone of every unit. The army soldiers who had tasted the war were shrewd and more reserved.

Boris and I walked around with Valka, who had calmed down a bit and was even happy as he saw the strength of his people. Passing the guns he patted them and winked at me good-naturedly, whispering, "Our side's on top, your honor!"

"Shut up, you fool," I exploded.

Valka's face grew sober at once. He took hold of my arm, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. It was low of me. Please don't be angry. I understand." His sincerity and good heart were disarming.

We wandered among the men, field guns, horses and munition boxes. In front of the Hotel Dresden we stopped. The ballroom on the first floor was now a jail, and yesterday's crowd of prisoners was packed in there, men and women, all together. A soldier on the steps of the hotel warned us, "Don't come near, comrades." We stood at the edge of the sidewalk and looked at the human beings behind the glass of the windows. They had been kept there all night long, bunched together, trembling every time the door opened or the guards changed. Since yesterday no food had been given them. Haggard and worn out, they dared not ask for it. Those who had strength walked back and forth from window to window or across the ballroom. The rest sat or lay on the floor, chairs and couches. In the last window a woman held a child about two years old in her arms, and we could see that the child was crying. The woman was rather nice-looking, what we called in the army "a meat ball," round, soft and puffy. She kept her dark shawl around her head and shoulders, and with its ends she covered the child and swayed continuously, trying to lull it to sleep. Now and then she bent and spoke softly to it. Her

curly blond hair, sticking out from under her shawl, hung over the black fringe and the baby's white head. Now and then she threw her head back desperately, and with slightly bulging eyes, looked around and through the window-panes.

Boris, standing beside me, smoked nervously. "This is awful—abominable—awful," he said over and over under his breath. The crowd moiled around us, paying little heed to the prisoners behind the windows.

"What did you say, Boris?" asked Valka.

"Nothing—nothing. I was just looking at that child." Boris quickly lighted a new cigarette.

Valka nodded. "Damn it, it's a shame. Maybe the kid is sick."

"Come on," I said, "let's talk to the guard."

We all three sat down at the edge of the foundation next to the guard on the steps. He did not stir. We looked him over sidewise. An elderly man with a yellowish mustache and a week of unshaved beard. His face was brown, with a dark red bulbous nose. He sniffed continuously, with a cold, coughed and rested his head on the rifle standing upright between his knees, held there by both his arms, cooling his forehead on the bore of his gun. His eyes were the color of clear beer and one of them squinted, which gave him a slightly shrewd expression. We started a non-committal conversation. Where was he from? How swell it is that the artillery had gone to the Reds. Why doesn't he go to the hospital for his cold? A cigarette? No? How about a "goat's ankle"? A goat's ankle in army slang was a sort of pipe made on the spot out of news or wrapping paper and filled with tobacco or any other dried weed handy. You smoked it, bowl and all, and threw away the stem. It was a man's smoke or worse.

Goat's ankle broke his indifference. I had tobacco. The soldier had a piece of old crumpled newspaper. An old one

was considered much better than a new one. Rolling the pipe in a masterly way out of a triangle of paper, the soldier licked his lips and, squinting one eye still more, said with the husky voice of a cold, "Nothing better than a goat's ankle to clear a cold out of your head. Good for lice, too, if you let the smoke out under your shirt. That's what I was doing night before last. A damn draft blew all around me and here I am full of cold. You never know what'll start what."

"Say, comrade, what'll you do with all those prisoners there inside? The women and children?"

"Hell, what do I know about them? They," he pointed inside of the hotel, "told me to guard those windows from the outside. It don't make any difference to me. I'll guard them all right. I'm tired of fighting anyhow. So here I sit. If you ask me, there's nothing to guard."

Boris held a match for him and said, as if the words came hard, "There's a woman at the third window with a child. It seems to be crying all the time. Couldn't you do something for the kid?"

Valka added, "I don't think there's any danger from that woman or her baby."

"Oh, hell! Danger!" The soldier spat a long string of saliva after his first deep inhale. "No—no danger—just a hangover from somebody else's drinking," he quoted a proverb.

"Let's go and see what's the matter with her," I proposed.

"Go find out if you want to. I don't feel like moving. Go on up to the window." The soldier nodded, deeply engrossed in the healing quality of the goat's ankle.

We went. The woman looked at us and pressed the child closer to her bosom. We motioned to her to open the window, but frightened, she began to back away inside. Valka climbed on to the edge of the foundation, rapped on the lower glass, and hanging with one hand, kept motioning with

the other, urging her to lift the latch. She did not understand. From the darkness a man appeared and threw the window open. I did not like his looks, something reactionary in his tall stature. "Plain clothes man," I thought. I realized that with his "mug" in the window and the excited Reds outside, we wouldn't have a chance to do anything for the woman and baby. So the moment he opened the window, I yelled, "Get the hell away from that window, you dog's face. Back away, Judas, or you'll get one between the eyes!" The soldiers and artillerymen around stopped and turned toward us. The plain-clothes man disappeared as if the wind had whisked him away. Somebody laughed.

"Doesn't like it."

Valka, clinging to the wall, spoke gently to the woman. In a few seconds a group of prisoners gathered behind her. I climbed up on the foundation. Being taller than Valka, my eyes were flush with the sill.

"You men keep away from the window. Keep away, I tell you," I muttered as loud as I dared. "Don't approach. Get all the women and kids here." The prisoners obeyed, and soon about fifteen women and ten children were gathered together. We talked with them. They were all hungry; some had not eaten for the last thirty-six hours. With scared hushed voices they all complained at once. A few children cried loudly. The little one in the arms of the puffy blonde woman screamed, choking himself painfully and continuously. The heavy shawl which the woman pulled over his face, trying to quiet him, did not help much. The soldiers down below began to ask what all this was about. One climbed up next to Valka. I felt that the moment had come to act. I beckoned the woman to me. When she approached cautiously, "Give me the kid. Don't be afraid," I said quickly. "Come on, I won't hurt him. Set him on the sill."

The tiny bit of crying pink boy in short pants and a

sweater emerged from the depths of the black shawl and was placed near my hand on the sill. Over my shoulder I asked the soldiers below to hold my knees, grabbed him, lifted him over my head and held him there for a while. He suddenly became silent, but presently bawled at the top of his lungs, "Niam—niam—Vania good boy—wha-a-a!"

A roar of laughter greeted his bawl. I stepped down, giving him to Boris who took him carefully with a knack which surprised me. A piece of bread appeared in the baby's hands and the next moment he nearly choked on it. An elderly, sour-looking soldier took it away and gave it to him piece by piece, picking them from the chunk, and smacking his tongue. His face was not made for a laugh or a smile, and all his efforts to be pleasant made him look more sour. In Boris' hands the boy became the center of attention. Even the soldier-guard came close and observed him through a squinted eye. "A healthy pup," he said with satisfaction and jealousy. The rest also tried to help in every possible way. One, wiping the child's tears with a filthy handkerchief, looked like an elephant trying to thread a needle. In his effort, he even stuck out his tongue.

"Never mind, roly-poly pudgy-wudgy," he sang out a string of made-up words supposed to be understandable to a child. "A couple of tears don't count. They're just spit. Now it's here; now it's gone—plain water. Shari-wari—cari—mari." He burred his abracadabra.

Another artilleryman asked for a piece of sugar. Still another tried to get the baby from Boris, who did not want to release him and the two argued in a friendly manner.

"Comrade, give me that baby chick. I won't drop him."

Boris looked doubtfully at the soldier's six feet six of solid flesh and bone. "Well, I guess he's all right with me."

"Oh, come on, comrade, he ain't your property. Just let me rock him on my hand."

Unwillingly, Boris placed the boy in the outstretched palm. The little one squatted there like a kitten in an arm-chair while Boris held him by the waist, the palm went up and down, and Boris and the soldier watched him with silly tenderness.

"Don't swing that kid around. He ain't a gun!" somebody shouted. The soldier turned his head and Boris took the child back into his arms again. I was astonished by these motions from the cold and reserved Boris. He was almost as agitated as the mother who stood in the window watching and trying to make herself heard.

Valka, meantime, did not waste any time. He talked to the soldiers vividly, holding them by the lapel or patting them on the shoulder. It wasn't hard work; he had the whole crowd in hand. In no time they were sure that the women and children should be taken care of and fed or freed or something; anything except to be forced to stay with the men as prisoners.

"There's enough suffering around," said a soldier.

"We're not Whites, are we?" asked another.

"I've got five of them at home."

"Who ever heard of such a thing—kids locked up?"

"Innocent souls . . ."

"Don't waste your breath, comrade. It's a closed case."

"Let's get them out. Come on, women, get out."

"Wait a moment! Wait a moment! I'm supposed to be guarding them," shouted the "goat's ankle" without any conviction in his voice.

"Well, you're not letting out any White Hands. Kids and skirts don't count."

"Come on, beautiful, climb out."

And the game started. A ladder appeared from nowhere. Women were shifted over the window-sill and handed to those below. Some were afraid. The young

ones were pinched and tickled, the older ones teased and joked. The blonde puffy woman was one of the first. A young artilleryman grabbed her in his arms in the middle of the ladder and squeezed her tightly. "What a sweetheart," he shouted. "Pure down, I'm telling you, pure down!" The woman, defending herself from his too inquisitive hands, laughed, the tears still on her cheeks.

In ten minutes all the women and children were on the street. The guard himself stuck his head inside and hollered, "All the women are out—any more kids?"

The tall man in civilian clothes approached him, gesticulating. He did not get far. The soldier smacked him in the middle of the face and shut the window. Then he climbed down and took away the ladder.

"Step aside, step aside, comrades," a voice yelled. It was two hundred and fifty pounds of sergeant of artillery making his way through the crowd. He held a couple of canteens in his hand, and under his arm a loaf of bread. There was something bacchanalian in him. His shiny red and light brown face was twined around with an air of triumph. Behind him another artilleryman carried a kettle and more bread. A wholesale feeding took place, as though all these men were the most gracious hosts; that they were entertaining close relatives or honored guests. Almost all were conscripts, thirty-eight or forty years old, probably with children of their own. They wallowed in pleasure, seeing the little ones belching and bubbling soup and tea straight from the canteens. Lined up in a row, they stood under the wall and the sergeant from one end, and another soldier from the other, held the canteens to a little mouth; gave it a swallow and moved to the next mouth. Valka, like an excited pup, ran in between them and, breaking piece after piece from the loaf, distributed it among the children. In thin voices the tots piped, "Thanks, uncle."

One girl curtsied. "Look at the ballerina," the sergeant laughed, and wiggled his legs, imitating the curtsy to everybody's unrestrained joy. He held the canteen to the girl's mouth again and gave her an extra swallow.

The little boy, the first one, got more attention than any other, probably because of his plump and appetizing mother. Propped up on the bore of a field cannon as though riding horseback, he sucked a piece of sugar from each hand. The artillerymen crowded around, flirting freely with the mother. Blushing, she glanced toward the windows of the ballroom now and then. If her husband was there he did not appear. The baby began to ride the field piece as if it were a horse, banging its sides with his pudgy little feet.

"Be careful, Vania." The woman held him.

"Never mind, comrade beautiful," said a young artilleryman, putting his hands on hers. "You've got a growing warrior. Let him enjoy himself. Are you White or Red?" He turned to the boy.

"Niam—niam!" the boy answered, licking the sugar.

"Correct, comrade. All power to the Councils," agreed the soldier in mocking solemnity. "Now tell it to your mother, and we'll enlist you both in the Communistic Party."

The big door of the Hotel Dresden banged open and a man in officer's clothes without insignia ran down the steps. Bareheaded, his face young and smart, his head regular, with closely cropped pale blond hair and rosy cheeks, he yelled to the guard who was just finishing his goat's ankle and whose cold seemed relieved.

"Who let these prisoners out? What's going on here? Do you want to step up to the wall?"

"I'm talking to you, Comrade Guard. What's all this about?" He pointed to the women and children. "Who gave you permission to let them out?"

Still soaking up the smoke, the guard repeated calmly, "Who gave me permission? Nobody did. What of it?"

"This much of it—that it's going to take me one minute to put you up against the wall."

"Who told you so?" asked the guard calmly.

"Follow me. And no back talk. I'll show you who told me. All you Whites," the officer addressed the women, "march inside."

Some of the frightened women turned toward the steps or started to take their children out of the feeding line. The sergeant with the beaming face paid little attention to the officer. He was still busy with the feeding and was dividing what was left among the women. When they began to lead the children away from his canteen, he stopped, opening his mouth.

"What's the matter . . ." he began. "Who the hell is that?" he asked, pointing to the officer who was holding the door open and waiting for the women to pass.

"Commandant of the Dresden," the guard answered, scrunching out his goat's ankle. "Throwing orders around just like any old-time officer—no sense at all."

"Follow me. Stop gabbling. Those are your orders," shouted the commandant. "Hurry up, White Hands." He addressed the women. They moved toward him in a group.

"Whoa—hold your horses, Comrade Commandant," bellowed the sergeant of artillery, with a canteen at a child's mouth, and grabbing the nearest woman with his other hand. "What's your hurry?" He straightened up and said with weight to the women, "Stay where you are, comrades, and leave the children alone." The women stood helpless, not knowing whom to obey. Slowly and pompously the sergeant started toward the officer. "I ain't used to making war with females and minors, comrade. My little cannon are for grown-ups. . . ."

"Did you release those Whites?" the commandant interrupted him.

"Suppose I did. What of it?"

"You overstepped your rights, Sergeant. You'll answer for this."

"Somehow you annoy me, Comrade Commandant," the sergeant spoke pleasantly. "Roll along now. Roll along. You're a useless ornament. There's enough noise around here without your getting hot. So long, 'Whistle.'"

Purple in the face, the officer came down and faced the huge bulk of the man. "Red Sergeant, I'm the Red commandant of the Hotel Dresden. The prisoners are entrusted to my care. Are you going to interfere with my revolutionary duty?"

"If I smell you around any longer, Comrade Commandant, I'm afraid I'll crunch your bones, duty or no duty. Who the hell do you think I am?" The sergeant spoke calmly and in a deep even voice, but now he turned his head slightly and raised his voice a bit. "First section, stand by—maybe we'll have to shoo off the commandant where he belongs!"

The artillerymen gathered behind him, ready to move—and kill—their mood changed in the flash of a second. They knew that they were ace in the game. They were the people. The people had risen. There was nobody going to order the people around; nobody who would dare to disturb them in what they considered right. They were not afraid of the Central Committee either, not with sixteen field pieces gaping into every window of the house in which the committee presided. The officer got it at once. Without waiting, he turned around and, running up the steps, shouted, "I'm going to telephone the Central Committee."

"Telephone the devil's mother's privy, louse," some one called after him as he disappeared behind the door.

The sergeant, artillerymen and other soldiers went back to the children and began to play with them and feed them again, as if nothing had happened. I felt somebody nudging me. It was Boris; pale, lips trembling, his whole face twitching. So abrupt was the change, so strange, that I was startled. His hands were wet and cold.

"What's the matter, Boris?"

"Let's move aside, Richard. I've got to tell you something."

"Boris, you're shivering all over. Get hold of yourself. What's happened?"

Dragging me with him, he went into the corner between the Hotel Dresden and an ancient church next door. His face almost in my ear, he whispered, stuttering, stumbling over the words, all his poise gone. "You don't know, Richard. I've never told anybody. I'm afraid he's hungry too. I have a kid two years old. I'm not married. His mother—never mind, it makes no difference. They live in the same house I do. I don't know—maybe he's hungry. I must get there, take something with me. I never bothered, you know. But now—well—I suppose I can't leave the Studio. You all trust me. But the kid—he may be hungry. I'm not married—I'm not married."

I got hold of his hands. "All right. Stop it, Boris. What is there to gibber about? We'll find some food. Why don't you take some from the Studio?"

"No—no," he almost shouted. "Nobody must know. I have no family. The Studio is my only family—my only home. I don't want any other. But if the kid is hungry like these here. You see he is my kid . . . my kid."

"Come on, Boris, let's look for food." I shook his hand, almost as excited as he was. "Come on."

Boris, the imperturbable, the acolyte of our fanatical training! Boris, the exemplar of our lessons in abnormal

devotion to the Theater and the Studio! He considered any tie outside of the stage a treason to his profession. He always held forth that one could not divide one's time between a family or love-affair and the theater. Now he was confessing his guilt. He was throwing his deep secret to me, whom he had always considered a flighty, easy-going chap. He was tearing to pieces his own authority which he had built up for many years for his own sake and mine. Whenever I read in *The Scarlet Letter* the sufferings of the Reverend Dimmesdale, I always remember Boris.

I went up to the sergeant who was busy with the liberated women and children. Pointing to Boris, I told him that the comrade had a child at home, only ten blocks away, that he wasn't sure if there was any food, and couldn't we do something about it. The sergeant was sending the children and their mothers wherever they wanted to go so long as it was in the Red zone of occupation, giving them his men as guards. Two women were going toward Boris' house. He went with them, carrying in his hands a full canteen of soup and half a loaf of bread.

Before he left he whispered to me, "Don't tell anybody. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Don't worry, you silly ass. Go on. So long."

He walked off behind the two women and an artillery soldier without turning his head.

I thought that this incident would tie Boris and me with even stronger friendship than before. But I learned something. It separated us. Next day Boris came back, cool and composed as usual. He nodded his head silently when I told him some lie I had made up to account to the others for his absence. I never mentioned the incident to him again. But he became more and more detached from me, and when at last I left Moscow, I think he was relieved.

CHAPTER XVII

THE POWER BEHIND

THE back fire of a rifle hit me in the shoulder. Once. Twice. I continued to fire. The butt began to press and pull my shoulder. I held on to it with all my force. Somebody was taking it away from me. I yelled. The butt rubbed now against my ear, smelled horribly of gunpowder, and annoyed me by talking loud: "Get up! Get up!" I waked up. Lyda was bending over me. I had slept through the middle of the day, stone tired and oblivious to everything.

Lyda came to call me for dinner. Smiling through her thick near-sighted glasses, she shook me without result until she rubbed my ears and blew cigarette smoke into my nostrils. At my look of rage, she chuckled. "Get up—get up. Dinner's ready. We can't keep it warm—there's not much wood for the stove, and the soup isn't good when it's all cold. Get up——"

"All right. I'll be down right away."

"Yes. Down on your pillow. Nothing doing! You've got to have something to eat. And listen,—a gorgeous soup. I cooked it myself. Stock from the bone and skin of that ham we finished yesterday, plenty of potatoes, barley, cabbage leaves chopped fine, and a tiny bit of red pepper, all boiling in the stock for two hours. And some clove leaves. It's hot and fragrant. There's no sour cream, but we'll have tea and dried fruit afterward. A big piece of bread goes with the soup. How about it?"

"Sounds good. Did you taste it?"

"You bet I did. Never ate anything better in my life. Come on, get up!"

"How is everything?"

She told me that the excitement had died out a bit. The Studio was safe. No Whites could approach it now. For many blocks around us everything was in the hands of the Reds.

I was wide awake, but Lyda did not trust me. She waited while I washed myself, and together we went to the table. Everybody else was already there, and we ate in silence. That soup tasted good. We all had two deep plates of it, generously distributed to the last drop by Lyda, beaming with pride and joy.

A small plain room, next to the hospital kitchen, had been arranged as a dining-room for us. The hospital cook had left the room and her job the first morning of the insurrection. She was a rude and boorish old woman, and we were glad when she went. Our girls did the work so much better that even the indifferent wounded soldiers were pleased. Besides, the girls created a warm home-like atmosphere. The table was covered with a clean white bed sheet instead of a table-cloth. Each of us got a towel for a napkin, and a napkin ring made out of wax paper with his name written on it. We were asked to fold the towels and to wash them ourselves. From the property room Vera picked two or three papier-mâché vases and stuck into them all the artificial flowers she could find from all our plays. She hung a few pieces of brocade on the walls, although Volodia, who was in charge of the storeroom, objected to her "esthetic contortions." While Lyda, Marutchka and Sima were trying to invent new dishes from the only three ingredients which we had in quantity, cabbage, barley and dried fruit, while Hope set out to consume the whole library and read one book after another somewhere in a

corner, Vera spent her time trying to make our crowded existence more charming. We had lovely old-fashioned flaming red brocade hangings from Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*. Vera and Gregor took down the cook's small white muslin curtains and arranged the brocade in a fancy baldachin over the window. She also got out a crude old Dutch window from *The Wreck of Hope*, which we had kept as a relic. When, for lack of space, we could not use the regular back drop, Paul had painted a painstaking Dutch landscape directly on the panes. That window Vera hung on the wall. Draped with paper flowers, it looked like an important fresco. It was symbolic, too, to all of us. As a final touch, she and Gregor set in the middle of the table two spike-headed stage helmets with thick wax candles stuck on to the spikes. The plain cold cook's room was transformed into a friendly stage set. Volodia looked around, grunted and turned to me half seriously:

"I'm lodging a complaint with the administration of the Studio. Vera has violated the fundamental rule of the organization. Articles used in productions can not be used for private purposes, except with special permission. When Boris comes back I'll suggest a special meeting of the Administration."

Boris, Volodia and I were the three members of the Administration.

Lyda, also half seriously, interfered, "In that case you'd better not share in Vera's offense by eating in this room decorated 'with articles used in productions.' You can't eat in the kitchen or in any other hospital room because it is against the hospital rules and I'm sole boss there. So you can take your plate of soup and go outside. Come to think of it, I'm not sure that I'll give you any soup at all, because there's another rule that hospital victuals can not be used for private purposes or individuals."

"Well, well, Comrade Volodia, where do you stand now? By the rules or by the plate of soup?" asked Gregor.

"By two plates of soup," grinned Volodia.

For a time nothing more was heard but the clinking of spoons and sighs of satisfaction.

"Have you any more cigarettes, Robespierre?" murmured Hope, continuing to read, and stretching out her hand to Valka. An open book lay next her empty plate.

"I'm sorry, Charlotte Corday, I haven't a one," answered Valka.

"Who has some?"

It came out that we were pretty short. I had two packages of cheap pipe tobacco, Lyda had about fifty cigarettes, the rest, maybe fifty more. We were all heavy smokers and in the last two days we had smoked more than at any other time in our lives. Without cigarettes, cooped up and crowded together as we were, with all the emotional jerks from outside, we would be thrown off balance and would be able to stand neither ourselves nor the oncoming days.

Every one had finished eating by now, and each hesitated to light a cigarette. Each watched the others. A sense of property began to stir, and the slimy feeling of hoarding. Hope was the first one who had to ask for a cigarette. We wouldn't have given it a thought in normal life. During the war we shared our last crumbs of tobacco. But now: "If I give her my tobacco, what will I do when I can't sleep at night? What will I do if we have to stay here two weeks? The shops—Red now—where will I get tobacco after all this is over?" We had heard that most of the shops and warehouses had been plundered or requisitioned. "Food is scarce, too, but I don't mind sharing that. But this evasive nothing, this trickling smoke, I can't give it up right now." I could read the same

thought in every hand, stopped half-way to the pocket, in every eye watching Hope.

"Well, will somebody give me a cigarette?" she asked again.

"Yes—sure, Hope." It was Lyda, but her voice sounded dull. She smoked so much that she used to carry around a little silver ash-tray in one hand while holding the cigarette in the other. She handed over five cigarettes. "I think that's all I can spare, Hope. I've got to find more somewhere. I don't think I can stop smoking right now."

"We've got to find them, otherwise we'll all gibber and lose our minds," appealed Hope. "I'm not speaking for myself, but for all of us. Thanks, Lyda." She nodded, lighting the cigarette, and plunged again into her book.

Every one lighted up and inhaled as if relieved.

In the days of deprivation to come, with more or less even distribution of the scanty supplies, the sense of property was stirred to an extreme. People went visiting relatives and friends, taking with them their own saccharine and tea, sometimes bread. Strange to say, this feeling showed itself much more in small things like cigarettes, saccharine, cigarette lighters, clothes, collar buttons, pencils and other unimportant trifles, rather than in fortunes, houses and estates. Those were simply taken away and people easily forgot about them. But you could not ask anybody to lend you a skillet. If you borrowed one without asking, the row was as angry as if in the old days you had borrowed a valuable piece of jewelry. People began to make extra pockets in their clothes and to hoard in them anything they could call their own, anything they could constantly feel and defend. Our first glimpse of this came when we were confronted with a shortage of cigarettes.

Valka proposed a solution. "I'll go to the Governor's Palace and see if I can find some there. I'm sure the

comrades will give us cigarettes, or at least some tobacco."

I went out with Valka. I wanted to see the inside of the Communist Center once more. I wanted to see the men who were conducting the uprising. I knew that all we saw on the outside was not the real power; that these were not the personalities which were driving the fight.

It was six o'clock. The sky had cleared up and the rays of the setting sun spattered the windows and cupolas with more red calico, only more flaming and brilliant than real calico. Only two field guns remained in the square. A group of artillerymen sat around them by a fire. Except for guards and hurrying messengers, the street was almost empty. At the big door of the Governor's House, I looked to my right and saw the familiar Tver Street, empty and straight as a ruler for miles. I had never seen it so empty. It was like a model of a city, without figures and without shadows. The perspective of a pencil drawing, hushed and empty.

About two blocks away, three figures turned a corner and clumsily walked toward us down the middle of the street. One was dressed in black and white, another in gold brocade, and the third also in brocade of a purple color. The two in brocade each held a shiny silver cross in hands crossed on his breast. The figure in black held a little box in hands covered with a white towel. They were three priests; an Orthodox Catholic, a Roman Catholic and a Rabbi, in the full regalia of their creeds. They were walking, their minds absent, afraid to plead for their church buildings before the Central Committee. They had gone first to the Whites. I don't know what answer they got there, but they had walked through all the fighting zones, risking their lives from stray bullets, and making their way relentlessly down to Governor's Square. They had probably been at it all day long.

As they approached, I saw that the orthodox priest was

a heavy-set, elderly man with long gray hair parted in the middle. All his features drooped—eyebrows, eyeslits, wrinkles, straight sharp nose, the line of his mouth, short sharp beard—everything streamed down to the earth. He was pale, almost chalk-white, and with difficulty he made his small fast steps. The Roman Catholic was also a heavy-set man. Much younger and taller, he seemed to lead the three. His large head stood on too thin a neck; his clean-shaven face looked like the faces of the Roman emperors, puffy, with many fleshy irregularities. From under his purple shoulder robe one could see clean linen. Most striking of all was the rabbi, dressed in black with a prayer towel over his shoulder and a black hat on his head. His rigid carriage, his forward bent head showed him more keyed up than the others. While the two priests seemed to hang on to the crosses with clutching fingers, the rabbi had an air of following the Thora in his ancient little round parchment box. I could not see his face very well; I saw only a large flowing dark beard, silky, and moving as if he were speaking all the time, or as if a breath of wind were swaying it.

They went straight into the door of the Governor's House. The guard, who was talking to Valka, stood with his mouth wide open and let them pass as if they were ghosts. Strangers were not allowed to enter, but the guard was flabbergasted, and when he came to his senses and exclaimed, half inanely, "Some party! Wait, you——" the priests were already inside. Valka and I slipped in after them, the guard following us, into a yellow marble hall from which a wide sweeping staircase curved gracefully two ways to the upper stories. The hall, the stairway, the banisters, and the balcony at the top, were strewn with people. They sat, stood, lay, slept, talked or smoked. The priests, huddled close together in the center of the hall

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faced the dirty mud-stained red carpet of the staircase as if they stood before the gates of hell. Gradually the noise began to drop down and every eye turned toward them in complete silence. Two worlds were facing each other. A bald man got up from a desk in the corner of the hall. He was clean-shaven, his tunic unbuttoned, a pencil behind each ear.

"What do you want, comrades?" he asked the priests.

The Catholic priest explained. His voice was firm, threaded with hysteria. They represented all the churches in Moscow. They must defend the houses of God before the ravage of the devil who has entered the souls of men. Some of the churches were refuges for women and children. God had sent this murder of brothers as a punishment to humanity, but the innocent ones should not suffer. The altars and domes should not be defiled by blood. Weapons should not be placed in the churches.

"How about the Whites?" asked the man with the two pencils quickly. The orthodox priest answered him in a high-pitched voice, shaking the hands with the cross almost under his nose.

"They promised—they promised they'd clear off. They are still human. They believe in God and the wrath of Heaven."

"I know, comrade. I know all that, but right now we are storming the Church of Nicolas the Miracle Worker. There are two White machine-guns in the bell tower. Will you go and ask them to haul them down?"

"How about the Saviour's Gate?" called a voice from the stairway.

Many other voices rose, mentioning the names of different churches. Soldiers got up and came forward. The priests cringed. The bald man looked sadly at them.

"I'll announce you to the Central Committee, comrades.

Wait here." He turned around and walked up-stairs.

"Throw them out! Out with them! Grab them by the beards and out with them!" a husky voice screamed piercingly from the desk in the corner. A short man pushed his way through the crowd and almost jumped in short strides toward the priests. Both his fists over his head, he shouted hysterically:

"Out—out with the hypocrites! Don't listen to them—don't listen to the sly foxes—to those ghouls who whine over your soul and torture your very guts." He danced around the three priests as if he were a dog and wanted to bite them. He spoke fast, choking on his own words, on his hate which was so intense that it could not have grown in one man's lifetime. It must have come to fruit through generations, hoarded and accumulated like riches. He wore a soldier's trousers and boots, a civilian's sweater and coat. His hair looked as though it had not been trimmed for months; his closely cropped reddish beard and mustache were streaked with yellowish gray, and on one temple, streaks of snow-white hair covered his skull. He was purple with excitement. His sharp tense features seemed to vibrate like a minor chord of some unknown instrument. Shiny unhealthy perspiration made it gleam and change under the hard light from the automobile headlights which had been installed in the hall.

"You came here to talk about murder, did you, you scavengers? You are the ones who helped lead me to be murdered." He rose on his toes and struck his chest with his fists. Without stopping for a moment, and catching his breath after each word, he poured forth his tragic wail:

"And I was murdered—I was murdered! I have already died once. I was sentenced to die because I did not want to kill. For nineteen days I waited for my end to come. And every one of those nineteen days one of your

breed came and howled over me. They filled my ears with words—all about death, when I wanted to live—live—live! One of your breed told me that the noose around my neck was nothing to be afraid of. But I was afraid. I nearly burned my eyes out crying from fear. But he told me about the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. About allegiance to law and murder!" The man bent in half as if he had a pain in his stomach, but straightened up at once and dashed on more bitterly than ever. "I could not walk. And one of your tribe led me from the cell to the gallows. I was dead already. I was dragged to the rope, and all the time he kept talking to me about the mercy of Heaven. They put the noose around my neck, and then he held out to me for my dying look . . ." He stretched his hand toward the three men who stood, their eyes glued on his small fist. ". . . Yes, for my last look on earth—when I thought that I was dying for the millionth time—he brought to me—already dead—that thing there.

"And after that—listen to this—listen, all of you, they told me that the sentence had been changed to imprisonment for life. And again—oh, again"—the man beat his knees with his fists—"the fat dog like you told me about the mercy of Heaven, and they dragged me again down from the gallows just as dead as I was before. He knew—knew all the time that I was not going to be hanged—and he never told me. . . . Never—never. . . ." He swore horribly and spat on the three silent figures.

"Throw that down," he shouted at the rabbi. "Throw that down! I can not see that thing," and he reached for the Thora in the hands of the rabbi, who jerked it back from the two swinging fists and quickly shoved it inside his coat, towel and all.

"A Jew?" The rabbi spoke for the first time, in a deep and powerful voice. "A Jew?" he repeated.

"A man—a man—a man!" The little Jew tried to shout him.

"God of Abraham and Isaac, Thou whose name should not be pronounced! You son of Israel! You who turned your face away from Jehovah!" thundered the rabbi and advanced on the little man, again stretching his hands with the Thora toward him with such conviction that even the half-crazed man backed up a few steps before it. In Hebrew the rabbi began to intone the stone-carved Hebrew prayer, his powerful voice fighting down the crowd, which now was in an uproar.

The little man, exhausted, fell into the hands of the nearest soldiers and the rabbi stood above him, mercilessly chanting the sweeping Hebrew words. As if gaining strength from his belief, the two other priests raised their crosses and began also to pray in loud voices; the Catholic in Latin, the Orthodox in Ancient Slavic. Three different languages, all dead, three different tunes and one hopeless faith. The crowd roared at them but stood aloof as if in dread of the two crosses and the little parchment box.

A tall man came slowly down the steps, gently making his way among the soldiers. The bald one with the two pencils followed slightly behind him. In the middle of the stairway the man stopped and raised his hand. He opened his mouth as if saying a few words, but no sound came out of the uproar. The bald man shouted, "Quiet, comrades! Silence, please! Comrade Muralov wants to speak. Silence, comrades!"

All the voices slowly died out. The priests stopped chanting and sudden silence, bordered by muffled voices in the rest of the building, got hold of everybody, as if it were a strange, unknown power. At that moment, I for one, could not have said a word.

The tall man could barely whisper, "Thanks, comrades."

His voice was broken, twisted. Without sleep, the committee had already been working for three days. This was Muralov, the first Red chief commandant of Moscow. He approached the three priests.

"Comrades," he whispered, "go where you came from and tell everywhere that the Communists are not beasts, that we do not allow unnecessary bloodshed." He spoke slowly, laboring over every word, sounding like the scraping of leaf falling on leaf in a forest on a quiet autumn day. "But tell them that we've got to put humanity back where it belongs at any price and by any means."

"Hurrray!" from the hundreds of soldiers' throats hit the ceiling and reverberated madly.

Muralov raised his hand and looked around, painfully but patiently. The noise died out again, and again the crushed whisper began to drip, word by word. "We do not believe in your God, but we are trying to accomplish something that your God would not be ashamed of. Your God did not hesitate to die, and we do not hesitate to die. Your God was lucky. He did not have to kill anybody. He preferred to die Himself. We have to kill because we can not all die. There are millions of us—and we can not live—millions of us. Go from here and tell every one of the Whites that the sooner they lay down their arms, the sooner we will forget and start anew together. That is all I have to say. Comrades, let the priests go. Do not molest them."

Without a word more he turned around and slowly walked back up-stairs. The three priests stood for a while, moving their heads as if sniffing the scent, then one after another started back. The crowd let them go in sulky silence. Valka and I followed to the street and saw their figures go into the darkness, their heads still shifting restlessly. We waited until they disappeared and then ran

toward the Studio entrance, both eager to tell the rest what we had seen and heard.

A man, from his dress a worker, stood at the entrance to the Studio. He had a red band on his sleeve, a rifle in his hand. Valka, in a rapturous voice, was talking loudly, almost in an ecstasy over the words and personality of Muralov. I glanced toward the man at the door and stopped dead in my tracks. It was Alec. Haggard, dirty, piercing me with shiny feverish eyes. I bit my tongue to keep from calling out his name. Instead, I shook my head and motioned with my eyes toward Valka. Alec understood. He continued to stand silent, motionless. I came back to my senses and said to Valka, "Valka, we forgot the cigarettes."

"Oh, hell,—yes. Well, let's go back."

"You go, Valka. I'm all in. You'll do it just as well alone."

"All right, I'll be back in a minute." He turned on his heels, and humming the *International*, ran toward the Governor's House.

I came close to Alec. "Alec, friend, what are you doing here?"

"I want to talk to you. Safe place."

"Go around the block. A small wooden door. I'll let you in."

He picked up the rifle, and with wide strides, marched away.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE TUNNEL

THE inner courtyard of the Studio was connected with the street by a narrow tunnel running under the whole width of the two-story back wing of the house. Once stables and servants' quarters, it had been turned over to small shops and craftsmen—a cabinet-maker, a shoemaker and a bookbinder. The janitor also had lived there. The shops and craftsmen's places were closed. For safety's sake, the janitor had moved into one of the unused hospital rooms. Thus the whole back wing stood empty. The thick wooden door at the end of the tunnel, opening on to the street, was bolted and barred. It took me some time to unbolt and remove the bars. Luckily the padlock was not locked, because the janitor had lost the key. Alec was waiting for me. I let him in and bolted the door again. It was pitch dark in the tunnel and the air smelled of damp and mushrooms. The safest place to talk would be right here in the tunnel close to the door. Nobody could overhear us and we could hear any one coming from the yard end. Alec sat down on the damp flagstones under the wall. I squatted next to him and took his arm in mine.

"Gee, Alec, I'm glad to see you again. It's about three months . . ."

"Well, I'm glad to be with you, Father. I can't see you, you can't see me, but here we are just as clear to each other's eyes as if we were out in the sunshine."

"How's your family, Alec? Home?"

"No one there. No one. Just a letter from my mother

that my old nurse brought me." He paused a little. "My father died six months ago. I did not know it. Mother and my eldest sister moved south to Odessa. She is Austrian by birth, you know. I imagine she hopes to get into the German zone of occupation and find her relatives in Vienna. When they heard that all the officers of my regiment were killed, they thought I was dead too. My nurse told me. They didn't know I had escaped—thanks to you."

Again he stopped for a while. I tugged his sleeve, not knowing what to say, but wanting to do something for him. For a long time neither of us said a word. Drops of moisture fell on the stone with a slight thud. A rat scurried away at the other end of the tunnel. Alec began to talk in a voice I could barely hear.

"You know, Father, my mother firmly believed that I was dead. I can see it in her letter. She wrote to me as if I were dead. Cold—short—hopeless—sad. So unlike her. She did not even call me 'my boy' as she always did. 'Alec Gutchiel. In case you find this, Sophie and I have moved to Odessa. We probably will stay with Uncle Carl. I am praying for you. Mother.' That is all. When I read that I felt dead—more—buried. She sold what she could. The rest, dusty, sick-looking, worse than if it had been empty, she just abandoned. The apartment was still half furnished, my room all cleared out, all the things I cared about, photographs, music, my collection of pictures of military uniforms, my carvings—all gone. Nurse told me that my mother sat in the kitchen for a whole day and a whole night and slowly burned everything that was mine in the kitchen stove. She did not cry and she did not eat. Nobody wanted to disturb her, so they left her alone. She wouldn't even allow any one to help her bring the things from my room. She carried all of them herself, batch after batch. What she went through, nobody knows.

“It wasn’t because she was afraid of the Reds searching the apartment. They had made three searches before she destroyed my incriminating things, just as they did everywhere else in Moscow, and she had been very calm and reserved. All she did then was to hide my military stuff, uniforms, scrap-book, portraits, medals, cadet insignia, album of snap-shots, diplomas, portrait of the Emperor. She put them into a couple of old trunks and gave them to the nurse. As a servant and a peasant, her room was exempt from search. But afterward something happened to Mother. She got up one morning and said to the nurse, ‘Go, Dunia, and order a mass for his soul.’ She never mentioned my name. Old Dunia went and ordered a mass for my health. She confessed to me that it was the first time in thirty years that she had disobeyed my mother. But isn’t it strange that Mother could think me dead without knowing it for sure? Maybe I am dead, I don’t know. Still, I think, I walk, I do what I’m told, I believe in certain ideas. . . . But oh, how tired I am, Father! How tired I am!”

“Hush, Alec, hush. Pull yourself together. All these things will pass. You’ll find your mother. This fight will come to an end.”

Alec tensed suddenly and brought his lips almost to my ear. His speech changed from a wistful reasonable flow to a feverish fast chain of words like the language of a telegram, where the sender tries to save money by omitting all unnecessary words.

“That’s why I’m here. Two days I fought Reds. I know. Two days more—end of Whites. No food. No shells. No military units. Civilians unprepared. Officers stunned. Petrified. Cadets the only ones who can fight. They know how. Know what they’re doing. The rest talk, shout, scurry in panic. We got to get more disciplined

forces. I must go to Tver—to our old Cavalry School—and bring two squadrons, two hundred and fifty sabers. They'll be worth ten thousand Reds. They'll gallop like furies into this town. They'll turn the tide and make all doubters take the Whites' side. It's the only hope, the only straw. Wait, wait, Father. Don't interrupt me. Let me finish. Only one man knows this. I told it to General Dorofeiev. He says 'All right,' but he says, 'No letter—no written request. A messenger's got to pass through a sea of Reds and deliver the order to the commander of the school, by word of mouth.' I said, 'I'll do it. It should be some one that Kutchin knows personally.' I've taken papers off a dead Red; his clothes too. Still there's a risk. If I go alone and get killed, everything's lost here. You must come with me, Father. That way one of us will be sure to get there."

"But, Alec," I interrupted, clutching his hand with force. "What are you asking me to do? I'm out of all this. I belong to something else now. I've got to stay here. You know we're not fighting, we theater people. We've decided to mind our own business and guard our organization for the sake of the future. God! it's hard for me to say no."

"No, no, Father, please don't refuse! You won't leave me in the lurch! You remember how we crawled together through the wire. How we slept at night warming each other like horses with our own bodies. Father, this thing has got to be done. There's no one else I can trust. There are spy-renegades among the Whites. Oh, if you only knew how hopeless the situation is! But we've got to fight. We've got to end this thing!"

"Alec, you make it damned hard for me."

"I know, more than hard. Maybe I'm asking you to die with me. I have a right to do it, Father. Tell me that I have a right to do it!"

"You have, Alec. We shared our last piece of bread,—

almost our last breath together. But when we came back here we parted, our ways separated. Now you drag me into the thing again. It isn't personal. I've given my word that I won't be dragged into it."

"To whom did you give your word?"

"My people here—the Studio—the crowd that trusts me."

"It'll take us only a night to reach Tver. I'm not asking you to fight. I'm asking you to go with me. That's all. Kutchin knows you and me. It will be more convincing if he sees us both. After that you'll be free to come back and do whatever you like. But don't leave me alone now. Don't leave me, Father. If I die on the way, I want you to know it. I want you to tell my mother that I really did die. God! I wish I were dead."

"I wish you hadn't come, Alec. What am I going to say to my people here?" I pointed unnecessarily toward the Studio. Alec could not see the gesture, anyhow.

"Tell them anything you want. If I hadn't come to you, Father, where could I have gone? To whom? Father, sometimes I think that I'm carrying this whole struggle—this whole insurrection, alone—all alone. I wanted to be killed, God knows. But the bullets shy at me."

We sat in silence. I felt Alec's eyes burrowing the darkness and clinging to my face. What was going on in his brain, I don't know. In mine, pictures raced with dizzy speed, and in every one of them Alec was in the foreground. His bulging forehead. His young, slightly bushy eyebrows. Almost feminine blue eyes. Irregular nose. Sensitive mouth and firmly developed chin with a deep dimple. When he was serious, the lower part of his forehead bulged like a lion's forehead. When he laughed, his cheek-bones shone and moved under his half-closed eyes. At school it was easy to tease him because he was sensitive about the way his large ears stuck out.

Here he is in the school dormitory, during the first days when we are all green and scared under the scrutiny of the senior cadets. At bed-time, one of them, foolish and stupid, sneaks into the freshmen's dormitory to have some fun. He pulls Alec's blanket away from him.

"Let me see you cover yourself with your ears, freshman. Ha, ha, ha!" He prances around in his nightshirt.

Alec jumps from the bed, shaking with fury. "Give me back my blanket!"

"Is that the way to talk to a higher rank, you pup! Where's your respect for the uniform?"

"You haven't got any on," snaps Alec, pointing to the shirt, and socks him in the nose.

The senior reels toward my bed. I roll away, and in a second sit on his face. Alec kicks his shins. The rest of the freshmen run to add physical evidence of their disapproval of the senior's behavior. Somebody hisses, "Officer!" Like mice, the whole bunch scatters and hides under blankets. I shove the senior under my bed. Everything is quiet. The officer approaches.

"What's all the noise about?"

"I yelled in my sleep," I say. "And he waked me up." I point to Alec.

The officer looks suspicious. "No seniors around?" He knows what the seniors do to a freshman during the first few months.

"No, sir," we both answer.

The officer goes away. The senior crawls out from under the bed.

"You're all right, pups," he says generously. "If you had squealed, I'd have punished you." He fades out, beaten shins and all.

Alec, from his bed, whispers to me, "Let's chum together. All right?"

"All right," I answer, and fall asleep.

And there is another Alec, worn out, serious, dripping wet, just back from reconnaissance. I lie flat on the ground, gibbering and shaking with malaria. Rain splashes all over me. We are in a hidden outpost in the woods, a platoon of us, ten miles from the Russian lines, half a mile from the neutral Rumanian border. Somewhere near is an Austrian outpost like our own. No fighting here near the neutral territory, only the watchfulness of dogs in neighboring yards. We can neither light a fire nor move away. Relief will come in two days. And I can not keep my mouth shut. I can feel my teeth chipping off from constantly hitting one another. My head is burning. It seems to me that every drop of rain falling on my forehead hisses as if it were coffee spilling on a stove. My hands, legs and body are freezing cold, stiff as a corpse, and raw as though my skin had been stripped off. Alec bends over me, lifts my overcoat, unbuttons my tunic and quickly pulls it off. I can not say a word, and vainly try to hold my clamoring jaws in my hand. Alec sheds his wet overcoat and his tunic. The tunic, which is dry and warm, he puts on me, pushing my arms into the sleeves as if I were a child. Over that, he puts my own back again, then spreads his doubled overcoat on the ground and covers me with mine. He has on only a thin silk shirt and a woollen one. Rain is pouring from every branch, from every leaf, from every space between the boughs. The night goes on for ever. Hour after hour, Alec walks around and does calisthenics. I clatter and clatter with my teeth. In the morning the wind rises. The rain stops. Alec and the other boys are sitting around me. Alec is holding a small cup in his hand and a thin stick, cleaned of bark. The end of the stick burns slowly, lazily. When it burns to its end, the boys have another ready. In an hour, with the help of maybe a hundred sticks, the rain

water in the cup boils. Alec holds my head and I gulp the water eagerly, groaning, burning my palate and lips.

"Thanks, Alec." I sleep all day.

"Thanks, Father."

Here is still another Alec. Behind a hut in a small village full of the infuriated soldiers of his regiment. The officers refuse to take off their insignia, refuse to put on red scraps of calico, refuse to stop fighting against the Germans. Half of the officers have been killed already. The rest try to escape to the woods or to the still orderly units. My regiment is in the next village, half a mile away. One of the escaped officers comes to us at sunrise and tells us about it. They are catching the officers separately while they are still in bed. I recall that Alec is among them. I grab my gun, jump on my horse and take with me the free horse of my orderly. I gallop across the fields to the back of the village, to the hut where Alec is quartered. The mob is in the middle of the village around the quarters of some other officer. They are yelling and shouting and pay no attention to me. Near the hut I see Alec sneaking, bent low, along the delapidated fence. I am afraid to yell to him. He runs away from me. He does not see me. I spur my horse; whip the other one. Both of them gallop heavily in the sluggish, plowed ground, grunting with each jump. "God!" I think, "he must hear the horses' hoofs!" He hears them. He turns around, gun in hand. He recognizes me, runs toward me, swings on the horse. Left about face, and we gallop away unseen. Alec smiles. "Thanks, Father . . . !"

"Thanks, Father," does he say? Yes. He whispers it to me, presses his head to my shoulder for a second and starts to get up. I get up too.

"Let's hurry," he says. I go with him into the street through the gate, closing it carefully behind us.

CHAPTER XIX

LIBERALS

ALEC walks half a block ahead of me. In his workman's clothes, he passes unsuspected straight through the Red posts. He exchanges a few words with soldiers and Red workers. Sometimes he gets a light from one for his cigarette, and moves on steadily, heading toward the White zone. At first I worry and am frightened, but as we approach the last outposts, snatches of cavalry sense from my war days gather in my brain and I pull myself tighter. I am detained at every post. I have no arms, so I have no right to be out walking. I must put on an act. I must use my wits. Comrade Smakoff's pass comes in handy; my Theater union card, my identification slip from the Studio also help. I have a sick relative at home and must get there as soon as possible. I have little trouble. The guards are sleepy. The workers don't know how to question or scrutinize. Either they are bombastically boorish, and boast of their power, or sentimentally drunk with the joy of victory.

Over and over again the same procedure. Before I can open my mouth, the commander of a post, a civilian worker, yells, "Keep away! Keep away, civilian! Can't you see the Red post right under your nose? What the devil do you want?"

"I've got to reach Nikita's Gate."

"Oh, you do, do you?" The Worker spreads his legs far apart and barks at me, "Your papers!" and turning to three workers who crouch by the fire smoking, and let him do all the work, "Search him."

"Let him show his papers first," grunts one of them without getting up.

"Fools! Fools!" I scream to myself. "Alec is right. One squadron of trained men will take care of all the outposts." But right away I check myself. If only there weren't so many, so their thousands did not press in endless procession. "Here are my papers." I have them all ready in my hand. The worker looks at them by the light of the fire. Smakoff's pass is dated two days ago, all the rest of the papers, two or three months ago, but he doesn't notice the dates. The documents look impressive with red seals and signatures.

"Hm," grunts the worker, folding them back and handing them to me. "Do you know the password?"

"Why should I? I'm not fighting. I've been in the Theater all the time."

"That's true. Well, I guess you're all right. Go along. If they stop you at the crossing ahead, tell them I let you pass. Onufrieff's my name."

I extend my hand and he shakes it. "I'm very much obliged," I say.

"Very much obliged," he repeats jovially, then bending over to my ear, he whispers, "The password till midnight is, 'Lenin and Smolny.' Don't tell any one, but it'll make it easier for you."

Again, to myself, secretly, I yell and grimace and shout and stick out my tongue. It is inconceivable. It is so naïve, so stupid, that I nearly betray myself by calling out to the workers, "God alive, men! haven't you any sense at all?" And again I check myself. Forty thousand of them like this, scattered all over Moscow, on guard duty and ready to die. What's the use? They'll win anyhow. It is will and conviction that always come out on top, not technicalities.

Three posts more. No questioning. A look at the paper: "Go ahead." Alec moves much faster. He is now about four blocks ahead of me. I see a large fire there in the middle of the street, and many men. Alec must be among them. I'd better slow up. Suddenly I hear shouts. My insides jerk convulsively and a chill creeps all over me. "Something has happened to him. . . . Go. Wait. No, get closer up. Go. Go." I march resolutely. "Alec . . . Alec . . ." I repeat, fortifying myself with the name. Two blocks passed. Another outburst. "Hell, they're laughing." They are roaring with laughter over there. I walk now as fast as I can. It is a mixed post; half soldiers and half workers, about thirty in all, standing around the fire in a circle, Alec on the outer edge. I move close to him; nudge his elbow. He winks an eye, without turning his head. The reflection of the red firelight plays on his cheek-bone and it also looks as if it is winking at me! Intent on something which is taking place by the fire, nobody pays any attention to us. It must be amusing because the laughter is continuous. I move slightly behind Alec, and when the laughter is at the loudest, whisper into his ear, "Lenin and Smolny." He touches the lobe of his ear, which in cavalry silent slang means, "I understand." We look over the shoulders of the men. An old soldier with a rifle stands in front of a stout worker about twenty-six years old, and instructs him in regulation rifle drill. Less than five feet high, with a round lacquered face and blond bristles sticking out under his small button nose, the worker evidently thought he had to make himself felt by being the life of the party.

The worker was clowning, pretending to be clumsy and stupid, tripping himself, hitting his nose with the bore of his rifle, dropping it, catching it again, turning it upside down and sniffing at it, wiggling his nose like a bulldog, a regular

vaudeville act. The thirty men who stood around enjoyed the performance so heartily that some of them held their bellies with both hands and bent to the ground, shrieking with laughter.

"Present arms!" bawled the soldier.

The short man grabbed the gun from his shoulder and swung it in front of him with such force that it carried him with it for a full turn about face, and finally slipped from his fingers. He caught it, making a leap in the air on one leg and desperately clutched it in his folded arms, as if it were a chicken trying to escape. The soldiers reeled and clapped their hands.

"Flop arms!" bawled the soldier again, between two attacks of chuckling. The short workman left the rifle standing upright on the ground and flopped himself flat on the stones, like the absent-minded professor who puts his umbrella to bed and places himself in the corner. The rifle remained upright for a second and then fell on top of the little man. He jumped up immediately and threw himself into a wrestling match with the rifle. He did it well, that one-man wrestling act. He rolled on the ground, clapped himself on the neck, jumped up, fell again, stood on his head. I began to laugh. Alec laughed. Everybody around us laughed.

"Trail arms!" came another loud command, this time not from the old soldier. The workman picked himself up, took the rifle by the bayonet and dragged it behind him, walking in a circle around himself, his legs bent at the knees and wiggling sidewise at every step.

"One—two—one—two——" shouted the crowd. With every count the worker threw his leg sidewise, and with his free hand, pulled up his pants. One—in front. Two—in back. One—in front. Two—in back.

"Ho, ho, ho! The devil shake his old man . . .!"

"Karp is a riot."

"Look at that snout of his—look at that snout!"

"I've torn my guts laughing."

"I tell you, I'd be willing to have my right 'sleeve' cut off to be as funny as that."

"Artist—that's all—a regular artist."

"Karp, ducks tramp you, do it again. Do it again."

"His mother must have laughed herself to death when she dropped him."

Alec moves to the old soldier; whispers the password to him. The soldier, smiling and happy, makes a broad gesture. Alec says loudly to me, "Let's go, comrade." I move out of the crowd and follow him. We march together. Only the sounds of our own steps remain with us. In a little while the laughter gradually fades out behind.

"That was the last post," says Alec, turning into a side-alley. "Now through the back yards. Keep mum about where we're going. I'm just a plain spy here."

He stops at the big carved door of a small but substantial house; knocks on it once, then twice. The door opens a crack. Alec looks around quickly. The alley is empty.

"All right," he says. We sneak through the door. A man leads us somewhere in the darkness. We hear hushed voices humming, talking fast, arguing. We walk along the corridor. Now I can touch both walls with my outspread arms. The carpet is soft and thick. The nap is sticky and I stumble over it a few times. At the end of the corridor is a crack of light that must be a door. The sound of voices is stronger. The man opens the door; lets us into a large whitewashed kitchen. A white, built-in tile stove occupies the whole left wall. The shelves opposite us are heavy with highly polished copper pans, bowls, jugs and kettles. In the corner the doors of a huge ice-box stand ajar.

The inside window shutters are closed and covered with blankets and overcoats. Two tables, put together, occupy the middle of the room, on one end a boiling samovar, on the other a large bronze oil lamp, a Victorian affair of a hunter with a killed boar. All along the edges are glasses and cups half filled with tea. Two small kitchen oil lamps throw a little light on the ice-box and stove. The walls are hung with cheap colored lithographs of scenes from the last war, and cut-outs from women's fashion magazines. About twenty people sit or stand around the table. When my eyes get used to the smoke and the uneven light, I begin to recognize them. Almost all of them are prominent liberals, known to us at the Theater as "second-night subscribers." The first-nighters represented fashion, money, diamonds, kings of industry, commerce and the stock exchange; their wives in exotic chinchilla, and mistresses in virgin ermine, nouveaux riches and retired "butter and egg" men. We did not think much of them. The second-night audience was the one we trembled before. That was the night of brains: intelligentsia, Liberals, Socialists, Democrats, Republicans, professors, critics, authors, editors, lawyers. All of them knowing the answers to all social and political questions, to all the problems of the moment. All of them swelling with pride at being so enlightened. All of them always saying, "We the people;" always organizing benefits for the exiles, for the Workers' libraries, for illegal Socialist parties, for the high fees of a lawyer who had graciously condescended to defend political offenders with a generous ten per cent. reduction "for the cause of the revolution." The gallery on the second night was filled with University students, teachers and white-collar workers, all Socialists, all with Liebknecht, Kropotkin, Lenin or Marx under their arms, wrapped up in a conservative newspaper to evade the suspicion of police spies. For one reason or another, they

all wore glasses on black cords and swung them around their fingers while arguing, stuck to student's vegetarian restaurants, though they were full of police spies, smoked continually and used great numbers of scientific words. Their manifestations of liberalism were always hysterical. They hated police and gendarmes furiously. The black-clad girls, students from the medical college, the most radical, used a long hatpin as a book knife and marker. During army parades or processions they used to stick the pins into the rumps of the horses of the mounted police lining the streets. They did this purely on principle. The horses were specially trained not to kick while in the midst of a crowd, even on provocation of a long pin prick.

The best professors were booed in auditoriums, if it was known that they were not Socialists. One of them, a brilliant professor of history, Vinogradov, honored at Cambridge and Oxford, and known as a constitutional monarchist, once sat for a whole hour in the pulpit reading the humorous magazine, *Satiricon*, after several unsuccessful attempts to make himself heard. The moment he opened his mouth he was drowned in cat-calls, whistles and booing. He took out the *Satiricon* from a back pocket of his Prince Albert, put his glasses on, sat in the chair and chuckled merrily over the jokes for an hour, while three hundred students sat opposite him and waited for him to start the first word of the lecture. He never did. When the hour was over and the bell rang, he got up, folded the *Satiricon*, bowed pleasantly to the students and then unexpectedly shot out, ". . . and so the attempt of St. Simeon to establish a social state failed on account of the complete stupidity of all concerned. Thank you," and walked out under a barrage of flying books, hats, inkpots and so forth.

The men and women planned their clothing to resemble the Workers' as nearly as possible. They liked to appear

in them at a full dress political party in the salon of a well-known cotton-mill magnate, who used to say, rolling his eyes and really suffering: "You can not imagine how difficult it is to be a Socialist with nine factories and ten thousand employees!" His name, with a hundred rubles, headed every collection list for "the cause of the revolution." He was proud of his acquaintance with real active members of all wings of the Socialist Party. He had them at all gatherings, and led them by the arm, introducing them to his guests. In their shabby unpressed clothes and dark shirts, they would walk around and shake manicured, scented, bediamonded hands. They always finished by shaking hands with the butler, to the adoring whispers of the assembled Liberals. Asked to speak, they talked profusely, attacking Adler or praising Lenin, telling Liebknecht what was wrong with him, or where the American Labor Unions ended and Upton Sinclair began. The intelligentsia devoured every word passionately, applauded gently and sipped coffee and liqueurs.

There was a widow whose husband had one of the first and most successful correspondence schools in Russia. She wrote books for children, where kings, queens, capitalists, police and bourgeoisie were represented as frogs, snakes, tigers, rats and woodchucks; and Workers, peasants, Socialists and the poor, as eagles, doves, lions and honest horses. She believed that her books were as enlightening for grown-ups as they were for children. When her husband died, leaving her a substantial income, she opened a political salon, Tuesdays and Saturdays. Each of her parties wound up with the guests' standing and singing in a whisper—the widow did not want trouble with the police—*The Song of Warsaw, You Fell the Victims*, and the *International*, the three revolutionary hymns. The sleepy servants were asked to be present for the singing. It was all

for them, for the working class, for the people, for their liberation and emancipation.

Here they are, the familiar faces in this shut-off kitchen. The revolution has been going on for eight months. The dream of their lives is being fulfilled. The "Great Bloodless" came first. The "Second Bloody" screams in the streets. They ought to be happy, satisfied. What are they doing? What are they talking about? The widow, her graying head shaking slightly, speaks freely, playing with the long string of black beads on her bosom:

"... I do recognize Communism as an experimental transition from a Social State to the most perfect and harmonious form of government of future ages, but I do not intend to submit to sheer force and to rule of the fist."

A bald art critic, with a fiery red beard and thick near-sighted lenses, interrupts her: "The people will not stand for it themselves. I know the people. They'll overthrow the usurpers the moment some one explains to them."

"... That's it exactly." The widow spreads her arms helplessly. "... Explain! They don't want to listen. Can you imagine, all my servants have left me. Left *me*," she poked herself between the breasts. "On the first morning of the first day of the insurrection. I've spent hours explaining the rudiments of Socialism to them. And they had been with me for years—all of them."

The lawyer who had once delivered a fiery speech in defense of a woman political offender in a famous case, and after that had never opened his mouth except on behalf of trusts and banks, puts in:

"... It's a question of leaders. What Socialistic Russia needs is leaders."

"Where are they?"

"If anywhere, right here in this room."

"Undoubtedly, but what can we do? We would be shot

the instant we tried to appear before that poor, cheated, stunned populace and those soldiers."

"That goes without argument. Order must be restored first."

"Thanks to Fate," exclaims the widow again, "the flower of youth, the heroes of young growing Russia, are with us. They can not fail. They are inspired by long cultivated wisdom of liberal Russia and by the glorious effects of the First Bloodless."

The man who brought us bends over the widow and whispers something, pointing to us. The widow gets up, shakes our hands. There are tears in her eyes.

"Thank you, thank you, my boys," she whispers. "Tell it to all the others; Socialistic Russia won't forget you in its gratitude."

"We've got to go," says Alec, his face twitching, trying vainly to release his hand.

"Our blessings go with you. Our blessings," the widow continues, while Alec tries to nudge the man to lead us out again. Another man approaches, about forty years old, in a worker's blouse and long hair, his glasses on a wide black ribbon. He is a writer, an idol of all the liberal intelligentsia, who has been in exile for five years for printing a satirical article on the ruling house. Once some college girl called him ecstatically, "a martyr to the cause." He heard it, lifted his eyebrows painfully and tragically and never dropped them again,—a martyr to the end of his days. Meantime, his books have been selling by the hundred thousand. He talks to us in a soft compassionate baritone, "Rest for a while, eaglets. Rest, young Russia. . . . Have a glass of tea."

"Stick it in your . . ."

Brutally Alec beats the words out and pushes his way through the crowd.

"Show us the way." He pushes the man who brought us through the back door of the kitchen.

I follow them and hear a faint whisper: "Nerves . . . poor boys . . ."

I catch up with Alec and the man as they run down the back stairs. We cross the garden to a small gate into a second back yard. We climb four stories of dark steps, go through another apartment, on to the roof, crawl over the parapet to the adjoining house, down to a third apartment, down more steps, along two back yards into a dry-goods shop. The shop is demolished, the windows broken. The man whispers, "The Reds are five blocks to the right. The Whites two blocks to the left. You'd better crawl close to the wall for those two blocks." Alec does not answer him. He goes out first, through the jagged hole of the broken shop window. He waits for me on the sidewalk and helps me to avoid the sharp edges of shattered glass. Then he turns around and marches down the middle of the sidewalk with wide businesslike strides. I fall in step with him. We pass one block, cross the street, and are almost in the middle of another. Bing. A shot from behind lashes the walls of the houses.

"Go ahead of me, Father," says Alec.

Bing. Another shot. We march steadily in step, side by side. Bang, thunders right in front of us. The Whites are answering. Five steps more. We are around the corner. A barricade of overturned carriages and uprooted cobblestones is built across the street. Cadets lie behind it. One of them shoots regularly into the darkness. The Reds no longer answer. Alec exchanges a few words with the cadet in charge and keeps on walking.

"I told you the bullets shy away from me," he says sadly.

CHAPTER XX

WHITES

THE Alexander Infantry Cadet School was a large walled-in building two, and in places, three, stories high. It occupied four city blocks in one sweep. The frowning and rigid architecture of Alexander I. had no grace, but the building suited its purpose; solid, to withstand weather and hold warmth; spacious, to supply room to live, study and exercise for fifteen hundred cadets. It never looked crowded, even in war-time, when the number of cadets was almost doubled. Singly or in formation, they were lost on its ample grounds. At the main entrance, two cadets always stood on guard, rigid and serious as the building itself, their gray immobility almost blending with the gray of the stones. From time to time they snapped their rifles in unison to salute an officer about to enter. The huge door of the building waked to the click-clack-click of rifles flying from palm to palm, and responded by slowly opening its full width. Click-clack-click, rifles flying back to sides, and everything turned to immobility again. Striped with the thick bellies of huge columns, the broad façade of Alexander Infantry Cadet School seemed never to smile, never to reflect the sunshine. In the daylight the building always kept its frown. Even the bright green roof made no difference. It was out of place, like a green paper carnival bonnet above Hindenburg's face. But at night a strange metamorphosis took place. The stone walls had been painted every spring until they were overlaid with thick paint, in layers of different colors. Under the electric lights, these colors were solidi-

fied to an intensity of green and blue that dwarfed and blotted out all the buildings around. The countless windows, without hangings, shone brighter than shop windows and emphasized still more the night color of the walls. Nobody gave the strange phenomenon any thought. In the daytime it was gray; at night it was the mixture of deepest green and blue sprinkled with the gold of glowing windows.

As we walk up, not a single window in the whole building is lighted. Before the closed gate a barricade of stones and two machine-guns, facing left and right with dark figures around them, is scarcely distinguishable. A few words from Alec to the cadet in charge and we are inside the grounds, through a small gate embedded in the big one. We walk across the empty paved approach, through the main building and into the inner courtyard, and are blinded by hurrying, crisscrossing lights. A huge search-light, open fires, flood lights, lanterns and pocket flashlights throw rays in all directions; jumping, shaking and thrusting their bright blades against sullen walls and a frenzied scurrying crowd.

The Whites use this inner courtyard as the Reds use the walled-in garden of the Governor's Palace. It is White Headquarters, starting point of all their operations, enlistment center, warehouse for ammunition, troops' camp, hospital and refuge for government officials and White civilians. The activity is spasmodic, feverish and absent-minded. It reminds me of the rushing about back-stage on the opening night of a show doomed to fail. As the evening goes on, every one—stage-hands, extras, actors and musicians—feeling the hollow weakness, tries desperately to be exact, to be quick, to be inspired, but all for nothing. The cold dark audience merely leans back in its seats waiting for the whole thing to end. No audience is present here, but it is not nec-

essary. Any actor entering back-stage, without even seeing the audience, can tell if a show is a success or a failure. The courtyard of the Alexander Infantry Cadet School is the back-stage of a cruel and tragic show put on with the best intentions, but gone wrong, and a failure.

The first thing that strikes me as I enter the courtyard is that this is a gathering of youth and of old age; men of middle years are missing. To the left, a crowd stands in front of a door with a hastily made sign, "Volunteers." Several army officers, well past middle age, and a few young cadets are separating the ex-soldiers from the others. The military lines are pitifully small, perhaps seventy-five altogether. In one line are aged officers, a few sergeants and corporals, a few gendarmes and police, a few civilians; all solid people, most of them with graying hair and beards and corpulent figures. These are put in command and in the reserve. Next to them stands the military line of those who go immediately into action. More officers, but younger; privates, mostly from cavalry regiments, a few cadets from out-of-town military schools, half a dozen young soldiers of the orderly type.

The next two lines are civilians, again one line young and the other old, very young and very old. High-school boys in their light gray uniforms, students at the University and the colleges, some in uniforms, some in civilian clothes with the University cap. Indescribable youngsters of the "lounge lizard" type. Little boys, one, at least, not more than fourteen years old. The last line is composed of aged civilians. Again, gray beards and white heads. Again, solid thinking faces, tired, bewildered, not used to standing in line for anything. On some of the faces I discover a strange expression, as if slightly insulted, as if for them, standing in line is already the greatest sacrifice one can expect.

The officers and cadets in charge are elaborately polite, to show up the Reds, who spontaneously and intuitively abandoned all polite forms of speech, all honors of rank, all forms of etiquette, who addressed any one as "thou" and "comrade." Here every few words, I hear "Your Honor," "Your High Honor," "Your Excellency," "Your High Excellency," "Please," "Would you consent," "It won't be long, gentlemen," "Your turn, citizens." A Macaber minuet, a court reception in an insane asylum. But they are not insane. The young faces are honest and eager; they are also determined, grim, and all the eyes look unwaveringly into the dark eyes of Fate. They may not know for what it is they stand ready to die. But they have chosen their side, the idealistic and, in the circumstances, impractical side of "Liberty and Equality," and they are going to stick to it. The slogan of the other side, "All power to the Councils," means to them "all power to a few individuals." They have heard from their mothers, their fathers and the leaders of Liberalism that the Monarchy fell because a few held all the power. It was wrong, and so it came to an end. The "Great Bloodless" was acclaimed by every one as a gigantic step in the march of progress, and it must be defended.

And isn't it true that all existing parties have united against the Communists; even the Anarchists? There stands a group of them, men and women, in dark shabby coats and black blouses, with pale twitching faces, burning eyes, whispering voices, hungry looks. "All power to the Councils is against their doctrine; they hovered between the Whites, who receive them open-heartedly, and the Councils, who also open-heartedly have said to them: "Who is not with us is against us." So here they are, not all the Anarchists, but enough. Those who joined the Reds had to give up their beliefs and become Communists.

Another proof to the youngsters that they are fighting on the right side. Plechanov, the most respected, the most erudite of all the Socialists, for many years a Siberian exile, author of books on Socialism, did not link himself with the Councils. He did not even give them his moral support. And Tchernoff, Social revolutionary, leader of Labor Unions and Workers, brought dissension into the Councils on the eve of the insurrection, but was overruled and threatened, and had to fly. Yes, the youngsters may not know what they are doing, but those who should know have told them, and have told them wrong.

If only all those youngsters and those who led them could have understood then what I realize so clearly to-day, that they were fighting neither a theory, nor a party; that against them was the earth itself, the concentrated will of millions, the intense summing-up of milliards of sleepless nights of brooding souls in quest of truth through the last three hundred years. The silent and virginal people of Russia, unexplored and unknown, was against them.

That is what all the Whites forgot, all the Whites from Anarchists and Socialists to Monarchists. They opposed theories from books to millions of men who had never heard of theories and did not want to be bothered with them. They did their own kind of thinking. The bulk of the Russian nation, that so-called "dark and illiterate mass," was deeply indifferent to both sides. It had, and has, a mysterious, eternal dream and growth of its own. The Revolution came because the waking hour had struck. Like a bear in the spring, the mass got up, shook off the fighting fleas, Whites and Reds, and said, "Don't disturb me, I'm listening to the spring." The fleas crawled back on to the bear's tail and keep up, till to-day, their small fight. The bear decided not to pay much attention to their scrap. He

had something else to do. He had to "listen to the spring."

He listens. He has time. He will do it for another couple of hundred years. To-day the "dark and illiterate mass" of bear stands on its hind legs and looks centuries ahead. As it stood three hundred years ago, before the Romanoffs came. As it slept and dreamed while the Romanoffs lasted.

The Russian peasant looks beyond economical structure, beyond the benefits of harmonized industry, organized classes, even distribution and material happiness. He looks beyond Kropotkin's exalted liberation of individualism, or Lenin's stiff idyl of mechanized communities, or Marx's one-sided "dictatorship of the proletariat," or La Salle's brilliant parade of wooden soldiers, rigidly holding the banners of romantic equalization. The bear looks far beyond all that. He leaves the material plane. Everything that materialistic civilization has achieved in the last two thousand years, he calls the "progress of the belly," and rejects it. He seeks only the progress of the spirit—in defiance to that of matter. He runs away into solitude, digs from his mind and soul answers to the questions of his conscience and does not tell them to anybody. That is why it is so difficult to describe and to analyze him. "The thought which is pronounced—lies," he says, and continues to live and think silently.

In his quest, he even forgets to eat, to sleep or to die.

The Russian mountains, woods and river sources are as full of hermits to-day as they were a thousand years ago. I have before me a smuggled letter from Archangel. It is dated July 15, 1928. "... Solovetsky Monastery, as you probably know, is abolished. It has become a Red Schlüsselberg. We do not know what goes on there, but now and then we see parties of men being transferred, under heavy guard, across the White Sea. Peasants follow them with

friendly eyes, and after asking permission of the guards, give the prisoners half a loaf of bread, or an egg, or copper, or a handful of grain, wrapped up in 'Tzvestia.' As a rule, the guards don't object. It reminds me so much of the days when we were boys in Odessa and used to watch the parties of prisoners being loaded on the steamer of the Voluntary Fleet to be shipped to Sachalin. You remember we used to buy white bread and blushing push it into the thin, black, chained hands? Another remarkable thing is that although Solovetsky Monastery is abolished, dozens of small monasteries have sprung up all along the shores of the White Sea and in the surrounding forests. I am wrong. They are not monasteries, they are just places where people, who feel 'God's urge,' go and live in solitude; sometimes two, three or four together, sometimes singly, and though they are the result of 'God's urge,' they do not profess any religion or perform any rituals. 'They are not monks; they are wanderers in spirit,' the people say. These wanderers just move away into the wilderness and remain there by themselves, supplying their own needs and not appearing in the villages or towns at all. What they do and what they think, nobody knows. The Reds leave them alone. . . ."

I also remember seeing a skeleton of one of these hermits while with a hunting party near the Black Sea before the war. In the wilderness it sat on a stone by a tiny brook which wiggled its way among the boulders, its bony fingers holding a stick whose roots had sprouted and become a young willow, its shiny skull resting on the willow's fresh bark; the natural pose of a man who rests and thinks for a long, long time. The ground around was covered with blueberries, goldenrod and daisies. They were not usual in that vicinity. In spite of the skeleton, the place was alive with bees and butterflies, and brilliantly radiant with color. Matter had died. The spirit lived. It looked as if

the hermit chose this spot, sat down to meditate and forgot to eat, to sleep, to die. His soul had for ever remained present and glowed in its constant transition.

Tolstoy did not invent "non-resistance to violence." The Russian peasant had it always in his blood, and he discovered long ago that violence, left alone, dies by itself more quickly than violence opposed or avenged. When the peasant retires into his own self, he almost always becomes immune to violence because violence, to him, is matter, and he discards matter completely. Sometimes he lives through the winter and summer on berries, roots and water, with only rags over his sunburned and frozen body, bowing to the sunrise and bowing to the sunset, day in and day out, lifting his soul continually to unknown heights of abstract discovery and ecstasy. Fortunately, he has not yet been labeled as a new Yogi or fakir, or advertised in theosophical societies, or explained and put on record for tourists. He never could be,—“The thought which is pronounced—lies.”

The bulk of the Russian people, not theorists and leaders, gave the opportunity for the birth of Communism, the greatest experiment of "matter" since Erasmus of Rotterdam, and now the Russian people will go to sleep again. In former days, while the people slumbered, a few of its sons overheard the dreams and mutterings of sleepy voices. They tried to translate them into music and words and painting. Moussorgsky, Dostoyevsky, Vrubel. Moussorgsky died insane, trying to catch and put on paper the chants and incantations natural and simple to every backwoods peasant with a voice. Dostoyevsky went half insane, trying to relate in words the faith of millions of people's hearts beyond religion, beyond creed and tradition. He escaped insanity because he touched only the edge of the peasant's soul. Vrubel died insane, trying to recreate, on canvas with rainbow colors, the tales and myths that every old woman of

the remote villages used to tell to the children on long winter nights. They always began, "The tale is quickly told. The truth is slowly found," and finished always with, "I was there. I drank beer and mead. It ran along the whiskers. It did not fall into the mouth."

Those two expressions are symbolical. For thousands of years the bulk of people has been looking for truth, scanning the heavens and earth, the wisdom of death and the sufferings of those who are alive. The truth is slowly found. You can live with the people, eat and drink with them, but never get close to them. The truth runs along the "whiskers," it does not fall into the mouth. Whoever touches the Russian backwoods people will never forget their courage, their searching, their penetration and the depth of their ideas. The former intelligentsia used to call them "Seekers of God." The present intelligentsia tries to label them "Seekers of the Machine." The people themselves stand humbly and let the others guess.

Swarms of intelligentsia, after 1880, went like crusaders "among the people" to enlighten, to spread the propaganda of Liberalism and Socialism. "It ran along the whiskers and didn't fall into the mouth." The bear slept, his ear to the ground, and waited for the arrival of spring. In 1917 the spring arrived. Not in 1905, when it would have been so much more convenient, when all the leaders, all the theorists said, "Now is the time." No, the spring came in 1917. And then nothing could stop the bear. Once I tried to argue with an elderly soldier-peasant who was going home after the revolution. I told him that if the front were abandoned, the Germans would pour into Russia and occupy the whole country. "That's all right," the soldier-peasant said. "I have plenty of hay to make a bed for ten Germans, and plenty of room on the ground to sit down and talk things over with them. How many

will come? A million? Two millions? We'll have room for all. Let the Germans come."

In 1917 the bear got up. How long will this spring and following summer last? The bear doesn't know. If he knew, he wouldn't tell. He's got to listen to the spring. He's got to smell the earth. He's got to argue in silent sweat with the black heaving soil which is his beginning and end, his master and his slave. The land—the soil—the crumbling earth—the bursting seed—the sap of the dirt feeding grass, grain and trees. The handful of mud put on the eyes of those who are dead, as a part of the funeral service. The new-born child's feet put first on the ground before they touch anything, to get strength from the earth. The myth of the hero who never was conquered, because every time he fell to the ground he got up with his strength resurrected. All this is in the blood of the people of Russia, in their minds and in their souls. Where we are wise, they seem stupid. Where we "don't bother," they are prophetic. Where we talk of "oath" and "honor," they shrug their shoulder. Where we kneel and pray, they get up, like giants, and with one sweep, revolt.

I knew a liberal landlord who tried to help his peasants. He granted them a thousand acres of virgin land. Out of it he scraped up six barrels as a sample, for a thorough analysis. From the best agriculturists in Germany he got an eighteen-page report. The report said that this was the best soil for sugar-beets. The landlord hastened back with the news. He also took back with him weather charts and indications for the coming summer, and a barometer. With his reports and charts, he hurried to the edge of the field. It was all plowed and being sown. "For God's sake, men, stop! What are you sowing here?" the landlord exclaimed in despair.

"Sugar-beets," was the calm answer.

"Who told you that?" stuttered the flabbergasted landlord.

"Uncle Osip."

The landlord turned around. Uncle Osip, a sixty-year-old child with not a gray hair, and a generous three feet across the shoulders, stood humbly, cap in hand.

"How did you guess, Osip?"

"She told me," answered Osip, pointing to the soil.

"But how?"

Osip took a handful of the steaming damp dirt, rubbed it between his palms, spat on it, rubbed again, smelled it. "Don't be angry, your honor. Sugar-beets is what she likes best." And he wiped his hands with some last year's grass.

"Well, I'll be damned! Do you realize that the cleverest German scientist said exactly the same? Here is the report—eighteen pages." He proudly showed it.

Osip took it in his hand reverently, "So many words," he said admiringly, and handed it back. "Smart folks, Germans," he concluded enviously.

But the landlord had another benefaction up his sleeve.

"Look here, Osip, you are going to have a dry summer. It says so in these charts. Make the furrows between the rows wide and deep so that they will keep the moisture and hold plenty of dirt for hoeing. It is a great help."

Uncle Osip scratched his head. "Asking your honor's forgiveness, I've already told them so. The furrows are wide and deep. If you don't mind my saying so, the summer will be dry."

"You mean to say . . .? But how do you know?"

"Don't be angry, your honor. The woodchucks are out of their holes early, the cranes make their nests near the water, and the ripple-grass digs its roots deep. The frogs jump mostly down-hill, the earth sweats all the time. It looks like a very dry summer. So the Germans say so too?"

“Yes, here is the chart.”

The chart looked even more impressive than the report. Blue, red and black lines and circles, figures and squares.

Uncle Osip sighed and shook his head. “Smart folks, Germans. Thanks, your honor. Don’t forget us in the future with your generosity.” And he bowed knee-deep to the landlord. The barometer was hung in a prominent place on his porch.

The same landlord is to-day a librarian on a cooperative farm made up of his former estate and those of a few other landlords. Through the years of terror he was hidden by the peasants from those sent in search of members of the “former ruling classes.” Uncle Osip still admires all the clever books in the library. He took his hat off when he first saw a sixteen-blade plow harnessed to a Ford tractor, and said humbly, “Smart folks, Americans. God bless them. . . . I wonder if they’ll be offended if we change the blades in the plow this year. The winter was snowy, the earth rested and got a good winter’s sleep. The summer will be showery. The soil ought to be just touched, not dug deep into. A shallow plowing would be very good for it. Do you think the American friends would mind?”

In his best Oxford English, the landlord explained Uncle Osip’s request to the American demonstrators. The Americans smiled good-naturedly. “Certainly,” they said. “This handle is for that very purpose. Just pull it or release it and you can plow deep or shallow.”

Osip understood, and bowed to them. “Gentle folks, Americans,” he said. “God bless them. Smart folks. . . . *Welcome the Americans to our bread when the crop is ready.*” He bowed again. But the Committee of Foreign Relations and the Committee of Exports did not take up the invitation of Uncle Osip. There was the matter of foreign currency to consider, the prices of world markets,

competition with Canadian wheat, trade, treaties, recognition of governments.

"Welcome the Americans to our bread when the crop is ready." The "dark and illiterate mass" already dreams and sees three hundred years ahead of Communism.

We wander from door to door. Alec is looking for Colonel Dorofeiev to get his last instructions before setting forth on his mission. He can not find Dorofeiev, who is busy in a conference with the assembly of military and civilian leaders, discussing the situation. We understand that it is a grave discussion. Every single echelon of troops they had counted upon has turned Red. Instead of disciplined faithful units, there are a few gibbering, nervous wrecks of officers who have escaped the mutiny and found their way to the White camp. They had counted so much on the artillery. It's gone Red. All they have are two cannon used for instruction in the Alexander Infantry Cadet School. The couple of dozen shells they had are gone. The arsenal is already in the hands of the Reds. What's the use of cannon without shells? The cadets and officers are fighting desperately. They hang with their teeth to every crossing, to every building. But the civilian fighters can not stand the strain. They go out under the leadership of a cadet or an officer, and at the first salvo of rifles or splurge of a machine-gun, at sight of the first dead among them, they throw their hands in the air, or run away, or hide in private apartments. The cadet or officer, left alone, fights alone and dies.

The civilians in council are also doubtful and wavering. Time after time they send delegates on their own to the Reds, proposing an armistice. Over and over the Reds give the same answer, complete capitulation. All names, all addresses, all leaders, all arms, all fighters, all funds, every-

thing to be handed to the Reds without question, and the talking will be done later.

"Atrocious," yell the White civilians and, trembling for their skins, come crying with fear to the military Whites. "Save us! Fight to the end! Fight!" In the next six hours another delegation sneaks out somewhere and goes to the Reds with a proposition to end hostilities, achieving nothing, but betraying to the Reds the helplessness of the Whites.

Alec gets word that Dorofeiev will see him in half an hour. We flounder around. We move to the big open fire in the corner of the courtyard near the field kitchen. A crowd stands about and gazes silently at thirty figures in uniforms, without overcoats; every single one with the Cross of St. George glimmering in the red light. In contrast to the immobility of the onlookers, the thirty figures move, dance, stamp their feet, clap their hands and beat themselves under the armpits. I can see their faces, covered with perspiration, flushed and drawn. Water is dripping from their hair, uniforms and boots. Prancing around the fire in a circle, they leave a dark wet track. A doctor in military uniform argues with one of them who does not stop his calisthenics for a second, and urges him and the rest to go to the hospital, to go inside into the warmth, at least. No. A man with the St. George Cross is stubborn. They will go into action immediately. They won't go into the hospital. The fire is all right, and enough for them.

We find out who they are—a platoon of a shock battalion of the Knights of St. George. On a freezing October night, cut off by the Reds on the other side of the Moscow River below the bridge, they swam, in uniform, their rifles above their heads, across the half-frozen river. They landed among the Whites, but they lost half their men. What was left now obstinately demands to be sent into action immedi-

ately. Next day most of them succumbed to fever and pneumonia.

Half a dozen civilians, women among them, led by a cadet, bring new dry overcoats from the school storeroom. Every one begins to help the Knights of St. George to put them on over their steaming tunics. Women who are working around the kitchen get alcohol from the hospital, and mixing it half and half with water, give a cup to each man. Another batch of civilians brings gray Siberian caps with ear shields, and still another, fresh ammunition for their rifles. The men gibber and shake the moment they step ten yards away from the fire. But they insist on going into action right away. The elderly Colonel of Headquarters whispers to their commander. He has brought them an assignment. Promptly the commander whistles, and with an air of showing off, rattles one command after the other, fast, fast. "Turn to the left! Right! Shoulder arms! Straight ahead, march! Arms in hand! On the run, march!" The execution of his commands is done precisely and so quickly that it almost blends with the chattering teeth. On the run, the men go through the yard, their bayonets glistening in all the crisscrossing lights.

"Hurray!" starts all around, and continues until the last man leaves the courtyard.

The assembly of the leaders comes out from the meeting in a body to see what the yelling is about—civilians, three women among them, and a half-dozen military men. They also shout, "Hurray!" Hurray for thirty men who, half frozen, go stubbornly to their death to set an example, to prove to the brains they trust that they do not waver from the ideas supplied by those brains. The brains shout, "Hurray," and go back to talk some more about a political platform for the Whites which will satisfy all parties, to talk about a new delegation to the Reds.

The "Hurray" hardly dies when another starts. Two trucks clatter from behind the back wing of the building. Instead of headlights, they have gasoline torches on poles sticking at a slant from the driver's seat. The load on the trucks is covered with tarpaulin. In the first one two men are sitting in close embrace, both in workers' clothes, with Red calico bands. One of them is smoking a cigarette. The other's head is hanging low. The trucks stop. The man smoking the cigarette pushes the other man down; he rolls helplessly, and with a sickening thud, flops on the stones of the courtyard. He is dead. The other man jumps from the truck.

"Two carloads of shells," he says.

"Hurray!" the crowd cheers again.

"For Liberty and Equality—hurray!"

Every one rushes to the trucks, talks, yells, runs around in circles, runs inside, carrying the news.

"Duroff brought the shells!"

"From the Reds—from the arsenal!"

"Duroff pulled another one!"

"He was disguised as a Red!"

"Hurray, Duroff!"

The name Duroff is on every tongue. I know him, Alexei Duroff, Captain of the Achtyr Hussars, son of the most famous clown of Russia. The only clown who dared to ridicule the Imperial régime. Adored by the crowds, he was arrested, fined and exiled for his jokes. Once when Odessa was ruled by the iron hand of Governor Zeleny (Russian for Green), the clown brought a pig to the arena and gave her a handful of fresh grass. The trained pig turned its head away. Duroff exclaimed, "Even the pig does not want 'green.'" The next performance went on without Duroff.

Another time, in Kiev, at the opening of the circus, his

partner came into the arena wailing at the top of his voice.

"What's the matter with you?"

"I was a rich man. I had a ruble and now it's broke," bellowed the clown, showing him a ruble bearing the image of the Emperor.

Duroff looked at the clown, but held the two halves of the broken coin up to the spectators. "Oh, I see—the fool is broke." The spectators understood the insinuation and burst into applause.

They couldn't do anything with him. He was exiled for a year to the provinces, but did just as well there.

His son had been a reckless hero in the World War, a knight of all four grades of St. George, promoted from the ranks of private volunteers to a captaincy, the pride of the regiment. On horseback, with two hussars, he captured a retreating German automobile from regimental headquarters—one general and five officers. At the outbreak of the revolution, he had linked himself with the Liberals. From the first day of the Moscow insurrection, he fought Reds and led Whites. Now, disguised as a Red worker, he had taken two trucks, hung with Red calico, into the midst of the Reds to the arsenal, and had made them believe a certain section of Red artillery had sent him for shells. They gave him two trucksful, and what Duroff did not expect, a Red worker guard. Duroff and he sat on the first truck on top of the shells. When they drew near the white section, and the time had come for the trucks to swerve from the Red zone. Duroff offered the worker a cigarette and a match. While the man was lighting up, both hands cupped around the match, Duroff stabbed him in the heart with a hunting knife. At that moment the truck was passing a Red outpost, and Duroff held the dying worker fast as if to keep him from falling down. He took the cigarette and smoked it himself. At the last outpost the

truck swerved crazily, and at reckless speed, thundered into the White zone. When the Reds began to shoot, it was too late.

Duroff, looking tired, stands leaning against the truck. The cadets swarm around and unlash the tarpaulin. A chain is organized and shells, like buckets of water during a village fire, are handed from man to man. The dead worker lies on the ground, face down.

Duroff asks a cadet, "Bring me my uniform." Under his civilian overcoat, he has on his red hussar breeches and soft Caucasian boots. A reckless taking of chances, to go like this among the Reds. A draft, lifting the fold of his overcoat, would have betrayed him. He puts his own uniform on, then takes the discarded worker's coat and with it covers the corpse lying on the ground.

"Send a stretcher," he says to the gazing group.

"Hurrray!" again. The assembly comes out; is told about the shells. Duroff receives congratulations. The brains of the Whites thank him. His hand is shaken. He is called "hero," "savior of Liberty," "faithful son of Freedom." Duroff's face twitches and he hurries to escape.

Two men arrive with a stretcher. Professionally and indifferently they pull off the overcoat and turn the corpse face up. The mouth is wide open and gaping crookedly. The eyes bulge and glint with the red light of the burning fires around. The eyebrows are raised, as if in the height of astonishment. The face is young and tender. The dark beard and mustache, never shaved, hardly curl. The men take the corpse by its limp legs and arms and swing it on to the stretcher, whose rusty iron squeaks. Somebody tells one of the women, a member of the assembly, who the corpse is and why it is here. She looks at it in petrified silence. She sees its head hanging over the edge of the head support, and nodding in step with the bearers. The woman starts to cry

loudly and helplessly. Between sobs, she says, "Bestiality, bestiality! Brother against brother. Our people—our own people." They take her away.

Duroff swings his carbine and walks quickly away into the black fighting night, into the night saturated with blood, despair and the shrieks of dying voices which can not even finish their last yell, "For Liberty and Equality." On the last day of the insurrection Duroff was shot in the heart.

Alec nudges me. "Come on, Father. It's all settled. We're to go to the railroad station on the corpse truck that's making a trip to the common graveyard. It will take a round-about way to drop us at the Railroad Yards. Let's go!"

CHAPTER XXI

BURNING HOUSE

THE stars sparkle fast in the high October sky. Peeking through its inky slits, they watch the darkness. It is cold, and the frost carries sound with speedy clarity. Reverberating noises cling to the crisp air, like the jingle of crystal glasses in a heavily curtained room. The thunderclap of the truck smashes all this to pieces and betrays the emptiness of the world. The truck is heavy, and through an empty world, it crawls along. In a space six feet by twelve, it carries sixty-one of us; three alive, the rest dead. The driver, Alec and I, in the driver's compartment, are listening to our own heart-beats; the fifty-eight corpses in the body of the truck are playing dice with their skulls on naked boards.

We can not go through the heart of Moscow to get from the Alexander Infantry Cadet School to the Nicolas Railroad Station, but must make a half-circle around the outskirts. For long stretches of silent streets we meet no one. Not a light in a window. Not a soul outside. Long streets and short broad boulevards and narrow alleys are thrown before us, empty as a desert, inviting a fast ride. But we move slowly—in an agony of slowness, as though trying to move ahead in a nightmare, held back always by something that can not be seen.

The old truck clatters, hammers and shivers as if an extra piece of loose iron were swinging from every single small part of it. Steam rises from the open radiator. On each side of the fenders, a large white flag, painted with a red

cross, flutters and snaps restlessly in the air. A six-foot pole reaches up next the driver; against its end, a railroad lantern swings and bangs. The headlights are dim because across the glass face of each a red cross is also painted.

In spite of the cold and the burning stench of the engine, an odor, faint but piercing, seeps through the air around us from the load in the truck. Every time I hear a dull thud or a scraping behind me, I feel invisible nails scratching my spine. I could swear I hear a groan—not a moan of pain, but a sort of gasping catch in the throat. I want to turn around and look. I want to stop and tear the tarpaulin away to see if any one is alive. Unnecessary. The corpses are two or three days old. No hope.

The driver is a Mennonite, a war-time "brother of mercy." The Mennonites, exempted from military service by the Imperial Government, were all drawn into Red Cross work. For three days he has been driving this truck back and forth between the Infantry School and the graveyard. Sitting straight and motionless at the wheel, he looks like Troubetskoi's statue of the Emperor Alexander III, a monument made of cubes; square head, square beard, square shoulders, square hands resting on the wheel. His long leather coat, fur inside, outside rough and greasy, is dark yellow in color like wet clay, and his square beard is almost the same earth color as the coat. The windshield is dirty. Instead of wiping it off, he leans out sideways now and then to look ahead. Otherwise he never moves. He thinks we are Red Cross workers to be delivered at the railroad station. Over our clothes we are wearing white smocks with red cross bands on the sleeves. Alec has left all his compromising papers at the Infantry School, but, unseen by the driver, has managed to slip a gun back of the seat. The one he gave me, I have hidden in the tool pocket of the door next to me.

From the moment the Mennonite set his square hands on the steering wheel at the Infantry Cadet School, he began to chant a prayer, deep in his throat, indistinct. And he keeps it up. His voice rises and falls with his breath; deep, booming, low; a slow canticle, mechanical as that of a professional priest. When it is loud we can distinguish the words "Gates of Heaven remain ajar . . ." Then the racket of the truck. The glass of the door next to me is down and the fresh air blows through, but without knowing what I am doing, I open the door and lean out as far as I can, inhaling the wind. "Show them mercy, O Lord Compassionate . . ." Again I want to take a breath.

The driver's compartment has no floor boards. It is so uncomfortable that it would be natural to lean back. But I sit on the edge of the seat. Not once in that ride do I lean against the back. No. Only a board is between me and the corpses, piled, without boxes, without shrouds, in their own clothes, as they were picked up. Packed into the truck like logs of wood until it was filled——

"Let them rejoice in green pastures . . ."

Skulls knocking against wood—officers, cadets, Workers, Red logs, White logs——

"Let them sing Hallelujah in Eternity . . ."

Then again nothing but the clatter of steel and bones and the thud of hard rubber tires.

We light our pipes. The Mennonite squints a disgusted eye at us. It is sin to him. When we try to draw him into talk, he says, without turning his head, "Pray, brothers. Pray, gracious friends. Don't waste your breath in useless words. Give those behind us the last help. . . . God will remember it in your hour of distress."

"For Christ's sake, leave off about those behind—and leave off about God!" Alec's voice is high and nervous. He is sitting in the middle, away from both windows.

"Don't blaspheme, sweetest friend," booms out the Mennonite. "You do not know when your hour may come. The devil may be around the corner. 'Eternal mercy is thy gift, O Lord . . .'" Again his rising and falling chant. Alec begins to fidget in the seat.

"Aren't we beggars and sinners all?" The Mennonite's voice vibrates for a while, slides down into nothingness with his next breath, and then hits the windshield again. For blocks it goes on like this. We cross the bridge over the Moscow River. Wind tortures the Red Cross flags and the ends of the tarpaulin. It blows cold drafts through the open floor under our feet. It pounds the moaning of the Mennonite into our ears.

"Virtue is thy food, O God——" Mumbling.

"There is no God," says Alec calmly.

"Mercy is thy drink, O God——" Mumbling.

"There is no God," repeats Alec, louder.

"Let us feast with thee, O God——" Mumbling.

"There is no God." A shout from Alec.

"Let us share thy crumbs, O God——" the Mennonite yells out strongly and viciously, then sucks in his breath, mumbling again.

Alec hammers out the words one at a time, "There—is—no—God."

"Who made you?" explodes the driver suddenly.

"Who unmade them?" shrieks Alec, throwing his head in the direction of the truck's load.

"A fiend is crawling under heel . . ." starts the Mennonite again, but Alec hangs on to him tenaciously, like a bulldog.

"Who, I ask you, who unmade them? Answer me. If you're such a confidant of your Almighty God, answer me that."

"Judge not that ye be not judged——"

Alec sneers, "You have a line for everything, you big stiff. You sit snug and proud and so God-damn sure of your virtue, with a truck load of carcasses behind your back. And what about them? Those carcasses piled like trash? They gave their lives for you—you fat dog—for your safety—for your future—for your children——"

"A fiend incarnate tortures me," roars the Mennonite.

"Shut up, you swine. I'll murder you."

"Stop, Alec. Stop. It isn't worth it." I try to pacify him. He pays no attention. He goes on with his raving. The Mennonite goes on with his hymns. The truck goes on with its racket. The dead load thuds and creaks behind.

"You're Russian, no? You were born on this soil. The first word you spoke was Russian. The first bite of bread you got was Russian bread. The first fire that warmed you was a fire from Russian trees. What have you given Russia? Where do you belong, you husky beast? Why aren't you Red or White? Why do you sit on your bottom and wait?"

"And a cruel foe stings my heart . . ."

"I'll sting you, once and for ever, so you'll remember it in hell, you whining louse. Look in front of you. Look! Find a hymn for that and choke yourself on it. Look!"

A house is burning ahead of us, ten blocks away, in complete solitude, like a huge red lantern amid a frozen and desolate black sea. We drag nearer to it. It is a small house with a garden and a yard, and no human soul around. Where is everybody? Where are the people who had lived in the burning house? Where are the people from neighboring houses? All the windows are covered with shutters or tightly curtained on the inside. And nobody even looks at the roaring flames. The truck rolls. The Mennonite chants. Alec spits hate. The carcasses in the back jam one another persistently. Block after block, the dead houses bite our eyes, like so many teeth of an endless saw.

CHAPTER XXII

ICE FACTORY

As we come nearer the railroad station, almost on the edge of the city, life begins again. We are in the White zone, where, until six hours ago, battle raged all day long. In the darkness we must move slowly, not to smash the truck against a barricade or stones dug out of the pavement. The crazy dancing light of our lantern, jutting out on its pole, teases us, one second showing and the next blotting out smashed windows, gates, walls, shop displays strewn around. Fragile flakes of snow begin to fly against the headlights. It gets colder. We pass two or three outposts. We are turned back from one street by a barricade. We wind through alleys, through empty lots, trying to find our way, and seem to get more and more entangled in a maze of dead streets. I curse under my breath. Alec, his teeth showing like a snarling dog, does not once take his eyes off the Menonite. He has at last silenced him, which is lucky because I'm sure that one more chanting note from the driver, and Alec would brain him.

We overtake a detachment of Whites without formation,—in a loose crowd. They turn their heads at the sound of our truck and nudge one another with their elbows. For a while we move together. They walk fast, stumbling over the cobblestones, too tired to swear properly. Their feet drag. When we are abreast of them, all faces turn, and all eyes look at us and the truck. The lantern bounces its light over the faces, and I see the whites of their eyes clearly. Civilians, cadets and students slow

up. One or two take off their caps and make the sign of the cross. Nobody says anything, only their pace slows. I can feel how the boys object to going in the same direction with a load of corpses. At last the Whites almost stop, and let us pass. One of the cadets at the head of the column asks carefully. "Whites or Reds?"—meaning the load on the truck. The cadet's eyes are wide, like a baby's begging gaze, and his mouth hangs open, drooping to one side.

"Both, brother sweetest, both. All martyrs to a fiendish hate . . ." chants out the driver, and opens his mouth, ready to burst into a hymn.

Alec becomes taut as a string and leans toward him. The Mennonite, watching him from under his eyelids, closes his mouth slowly and sighs. We go on riding in silence for a few more blocks. I realize that I am strained forward on the edge of my seat—that I am afraid to lean back. I slump down and hold my head in both hands. Immediately I feel Alec's hand being lifted over my head and patting my shoulder. "Are you all right, Father?" he whispers.

"All right, Alec—my head is heavy."

Again he pats me on the shoulder. I can hardly make out his words. "I'm sorry, Father, for all this . . ."

"Don't be silly. We'll stick it out."

"We'll stick it out," he repeats, and leans his head far back until it touches the boards of the truck. Having done so, he jerks it back.

"Lean on me," I say to him.

"Thanks! I just wanted to stretch . . . my neck," he answers.

Again we ride in silence. The Mennonite's lips move, but no sound comes from them. Ahead of us a string of fires is burning, and it looks as if an open space lies beyond them. That must be the railroad tracks.

"Drive faster, brother," I say to the driver.

“Not so far now,” he grunts, but throws a short glance at Alec and steps on the gas. We move a bit faster and immediately I wish we wouldn’t. I can not forget the load behind. Presently the string of open fires is right in front of us. Through the windshield, it seems to be moving toward us faster than we approach it. We cross a wide boulevard, unpaved in the middle, and roll close to the fires. They are burning behind an iron grill surrounding the grounds of an ice factory. I remember hearing that it had been captured from the Reds not an hour before we arrived at the Infantry Cadet School. We turn left and ride alongside the grill and the fires. Scattered men walk and sit around them. Now and then they feed the fires with the factory’s firewood and coal. Suddenly I notice that we aren’t following a straight line, but swerve and zigzag crazily. In a second I realize that the dead still lie on the ground, strewn about wherever they fell in the attack on the factory. The Mennonite has to maneuver to keep from riding over them. In the distance two dark figures with a lantern walk slowly, dragging a wheelbarrow and bending occasionally. We pass them. The wheelbarrow is full of rifles and munition. The two dark figures are cadets.

Still swerving and bouncing, we approach the end of the grill. It turns to the right, where in the middle of the block its straight line is broken by a toll gate on which is the sign of the factory. Here the fires are larger, and they light up a crowd of men milling around on the inside of the gate. Another much smaller crowd is on the outside, and the movements of this crowd are grotesque and strange. Out of the gate they come as if drunk, swaying and bent in two. Some stagger across the narrow street and crawl, holding to the walls of the houses with both hands. Others march bent way back as if sticking their stomachs out. One after another, the men leave the gate and grotesquely disappear into the

shadows along the street. With their hands they push the darkness aside and continue to push it as if it were an enormous quantity of black velvet hung from above in endless rows, which they have to pass before they can find their way.

We begin to hear moans and cries. I step on the running board and lean out, peering inside the gate. Alec's head is right behind my shoulder. The truck slows up a little.

"O Lord! O Lord! O Lord!" groans the Mennonite, and then I realize what is going on. The ice factory, captured by the Whites, was left in the hands of a detachment made up half of civilians and half of former police. A few police lieutenants in light gray overcoats are clearly visible. The bulky figures of the policemen and gendarmes are unmistakable. The cadets and officers who fought the actual battle have probably gone ahead with the offensive. The scum remained safely in the back. Standing in two rows, facing each other, the police and civilians form a narrow alley leading to the gate. Each one of them has a long shiny stick in his hand. Some of the sticks are curved. By the entrance to the factory itself stands a group of disarmed Reds. They had been taken prisoner in the factory and are now being disposed of. There is no room or time or safety to fool around with them. Almost all of the Red workers have red calico on their sleeves and hats, but they are forced to throw their overcoats and coats away. One by one they are jerked out of the group by two men, and pushed or thrown toward the two rows of waiting sticks.

When we get close enough to have a full view of the place, the Mennonite halts the truck. The clatter of the engine becomes stronger, but it can not drown out the scream of the man who has just been thrown between the rows. He hardly passes the first four big policemen, when they strike him across his back with their thin shiny sticks, which prove to be brass pipes, probably from the ice-making machinery. We

can see how they bend on the man's back. He screams and begins to run. He is hit in the face. He staggers back. Blows continue to fall on him while he jerks his body with each blow, and covers his face with raised arms. He does not dare to run any more, because a slash in the face is more horrible than a slash on the back. And so he walks a slow cake-walk, and with each step, the shiny stick falls on his back and he screams. When he is about at the middle of the two rows, the next man is thrown between them. We hear a yell, "Don't hurry. Let me unbend my pipe!" The second man becomes frenzied, and in spite of the blows on his face, runs straight through the gauntlet. He is tripped, and gets his lashing lying on the ground. The first man passes the gate and walks to the right, slowly turning around like a lazy dog who wants to catch his own tail.

The Mennonite groans, "O Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do . . ." when I hear Alec's hissing voice, "Move on. Move on, right away!" The Mennonite, without stopping his prayer, shifts the gears and steps on the gas. The truck jerks, whines, clatters and begins to roll. I fall into my seat, and as if through a mist, see the figure of the man still turning around. His arms remind me of the cut wings of a rooster. Alec kneels on the seat, facing the disappearing grill and gate.

"Alec . . ." I begin to speak, and suddenly jerk as if hit over the head. Through the back window, and over the load of corpses, Alec is firing his gun into the two rows of police. Whites. One, two, three, four, five, six. He throws away the empty gun.

"Move on, move on—fast!" he screams at the driver, at the same time pulling off his white smock.

The truck flies as if carried by the wind. It bumps into something soft. It whines; it slides. I get my gun from the door pocket. Over the racket of the engine, I hear shots

and shouts. Alec pulls the front of my smock and tears all the buttons off. He grabs my gun, steps over my knees, opens the door and stands on the running board. "Throw away that smock," he barks at me. "Move on faster, you Jesus!" he yells at the Mennonite. He looks behind him once more, then faces in the direction of the truck's movement and leaps down. I follow him, fall on the hard frozen earth of the road, but jump up right away. From the disappearing truck I hear a bellowing voice:

"When sweet Jesus conquered death,
Angels sang Hallelujah, O dear Lamb . . ."

Booming voice, rattle, screams and shots sink into the darkness. The fires by the ice factory are about a mile and a half away from us. I can barely see a dark cluster of people in front of the gate. The shots continue, but they are weak and single.

"Are you all right, Father? They can't see us any more. The railroad is to the left. We've got about two miles to walk along the tracks. I'll keep your gun."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TEACHER

AN ALL-NIGHT ride in an empty box-car, and Alec and I jumped off about a mile before Tver Station. Shivering with cold, we walked fast toward the long red-brown brick building of the passenger station that winked to us hospitably with three lighted windows. Everything looked exactly as it had years before when in fine shining uniforms and tiny silver spurs we came back from Sunday leave in Moscow. The passenger train used to arrive at four-fifty in the morning and we had to report at six. That left ample time to stop in the station restaurant for the chef's specialty,—hot crisp rolls and a half breast of partridge on one side and a heaped dipper of caviar on the other. The hot tea warmed our stomachs, the waiter was helpful and friendly, the partridge tasted good. We ate with gusto, cracking jokes, chattering, smartly alert cavalry cadets. Now, in their place, two haggard and shivering beggars moved swiftly through the dense soft snow which fell straight down like a lazy rain.

It was the first snow of the year. Generous and rich, we knew it would keep up for two or three days, especially if the weather continued calm, with no wind to start a blizzard. Four, five, even six feet of snow would cover the town, the school grounds, buildings and fields around. The school-children would throw snowballs. Gangs of prisoners would shovel the snow off the sidewalks. All the chimneys would smoke day and night. Shadows would be blue and the twilight short. Cadets returning from exercises would breathe deeply and the clouds of their breath in the frosty air would hang around their rosy-cheeked young faces.

“It wouldn’t be bad to have some tea, Father,” said Alec.

“Let’s not take any chances. Somebody might recognize us at the station. We’ve got to go straight to the school and wake up the colonel. Every minute counts. They’ll give us breakfast there.”

“I know. I only said so because we always used to say it right here on this spot after leaving the train. . . . Do you remember?” He looked around.

We stood on the platform. Not a soul was in sight. Framed by the lights shining from the three windows, three fluttering shafts of snow lay in front of us, like three hurdles crossing our path, like bars between the past and present. We did not throw ourselves at those shivering bars to shatter them. We did not walk through them into the warm room of the restaurant to take a place at the table where we used to sit. We merely stood in front of them and shivered ourselves, until unspoken sadness lulled us above the cold, disquietude and numbness.

“We’ve got to go, Alec,” I whispered.

He turned on his heels and marched off and I followed him till we came up with a lonely sleigh drawn by a horse with loosely hanging reins. A single man in a huge black sheepskin coat with the fur on the outside, lay on the sleigh, his head in front and legs in back. He did not look where the horse was going; he knew that it would not lose its way. Without getting up, he shouted, “Jump on, comrades. Save your boots!”

Sitting on the edge of the sleigh, we began to talk. The man was a teacher from a near-by village, a friendly talkative person, who sounded as if he were middle-aged. We listened, scarcely saying a word to the reasonable pleasant voice.

“Yes, comrades, this is a bloody business. The victims many—the innocent among them. Sufferings innumerable—

cruel hate—but what is all that in comparison with the results? God's world will begin to breathe now. It will open its eyes and start life anew."

"We don't know yet which side will win," interrupted Alec.

"The Reds will win, my friend," the man answered. "It can not be helped." He paused. We waited. "The circle is closed," he continued. "The circle of inert compassion. The circle of active cooperation has now begun and will go on until, in its turn, it closes too."

"What do you mean? I don't understand you," I said.

The man chuckled slightly. "It isn't so easy to grasp. Are you educated?" he asked.

"Yes, more or less," we answered.

"Who are you?"

"Just peasants, but we lived in the city before the war, and during the war, well, you know—here and there."

"Where are you going now?"

"To his relatives here in Tver," I waved a hand at Alec. "There's nothing to do in Moscow and we're tired of fighting."

"Are you Reds or Whites?"

"Reds," we both answered.

"It doesn't matter, though," the teacher exclaimed right away. "It doesn't matter in the slightest—to me, at least. I am interested in super-human problems, not in human labels."

"Go on—tell us what you started to say about circles," said Alec.

"Compassion and Cooperation?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's the result of my thinking, in my own small way. I think a lot. I'm a bachelor. Nothing to do on winter nights. A sort of home-made philosopher. Amuse

myself and play with my own thoughts. I build a world of my own. And then see if it fits the outside world. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. No harm done. I have my fun. It's amusing to play with centuries past and centuries to come. With milliards of human souls; those dead and those not yet born. With millions now living, but absent. When the snow falls as it does now, endlessly, quietly; when the earth sleeps, water freezes, and sap in the trees flows silently back into the depths it came from, the human mind becomes adapted to my kind of game.

"Compassion and Cooperation, did you ask?" We could not see his face, only his long body lying at ease in the smoothly moving sleigh. "That's simple. The circle of Compassion was the circle of the last two thousand years. Christ started it. Or maybe somebody before Him. Maybe He only put it into words. It doesn't matter. The world woke, matured and aged under the sign of Compassion. It was the supreme virtue, the supreme achievement. Everything bowed before that single word; power, wealth, science, philosophy, religion. For two thousand years humanity struggled hard to adjust life to the slogan of Compassion. It was hard going. An almost hopeless task. Wars to fight. Riches to accumulate. Other religions to tolerate. Compete in industry. Face failures. Punish sinners. Not much room for Compassion. But humanity put up a fair struggle. In due time, it released the slaves. It no longer burns at the stake the fellow who worships God in his own way. It supports a Red Cross in proportion to its armies. It gives riches away to charity. It even invented Socialism. Looks quite a success, doesn't it? Well, if you think about it, it isn't. It's a failure. The circle is closed. Compassion is about as useful as a fifth leg to a dog.

"Compassion is merely a word. An atrophied word. An erased and scratched-out word. During the long years

of its fight for supremacy, it became as dull as an unused razor. Maybe you don't believe me? If Compassion were the supreme thought, could you start a war? Could you possess a million? Could you make profit on bread, water, clothes, seashores, land? Could you bear to see millions of cripples walking all over the world as they do to-day? Could you profess Socialism or Liberty by putting your fellow man against the wall? Could you be a foreman? or a lawyer? or a banker? or a stock-broker? Not on your life! All that does not go with Compassion. Therefore Compassion is dead. It still stays in every text-book, but it is dead."

"Are you a Communist?" Alec asked eagerly.

"I told you I am a home-made philosopher. I put a question before myself and I answer it myself to my own satisfaction.

"And my next question is: if not Compassion, then what? I look around. I listen. I observe the world's doing. I hear people's talk. I spend many sleepless nights looking at the ceiling of my room, and I have my answer. Yes, I have it. It is good for me. It may be wrong for you. May be, though I doubt it. It is a good answer." He stopped. For a while the only thing we heard was the hushed squeak of the sleigh and the clop-clop of the horse's hoofs. The teacher started again.

"The next circle for humanity will be the circle of active Cooperation. At least, for another two thousand years. Instead of Compassion, the world will stand by Cooperation. Not at once, and not without a struggle. There will be martyrs and Roman Circuses and Spanish Autos-da-fé for the prophets of Cooperation. In time it will reach its height and die as Compassion did. But it will be humanity's object for the next couple of thousand years. It is so clear to me. In two thousand years we will speak about Compassion as

we speak now about the Mayans and human sacrifices. We will write about its queer customs.

"But when I say Cooperation, I myself am bewildered sometimes trying to define its different aspects. I see it clearly but it's hard to put in old words. New words will have to be invented. Cooperation with whom? With the best of humanity. What for? For the best of humanity. For whom? For the best of humanity. A sort of 'perfect selection' as opposed to 'natural selection.'" He laughed again shrewdly. "Can you grasp it?" And at once he answered himself, "I knew you couldn't. Never mind. You will in time. The sooner you forget Compassion, the sooner you'll get Cooperation. My idea will sound cruel to you at first. But cruelty is such an evasive term, and humanity can stand a terrific dose of cruelty. It has proved it in peace and in war. Besides, the grandeur of nature itself lies in its sane cruelty. In its supreme meaning, Cooperation is just as cruel as nature.

"Listen to this. Compassion tried to save every weakling, every feeble-minded and undeveloped individual. Cooperation will eliminate unworthy species. Compassion created a paradox. It created a world in which it preserved millions of beings one could be compassionate about. The under-dogs, the exploited, the heretics, the sinners. Cooperation will eliminate all of these, scientifically and painlessly. With Compassion dead, their presence will become unnecessary. They will be a hindrance to progress. A perfect carpenter does not need Compassion. He is a master. *Persona grata*. His perfect work alone should be taken into consideration. And for his work alone there should be room in the universe. Now take a bad carpenter. He needs Compassion. He can't find work. He is hungry. He is restless. The church worries about him. The Socialists worry about him. Statesmen worry about him.

Charity worries about him. What a terrific amount of energy wasted! Why all the trouble? Eliminate him,—scientifically, painlessly. He is a bad carpenter. He can not cooperate with a good one. He will always be behind.

"My idea of Supreme Cooperation—only the best with the best and for the best—will solve all problems so beautifully, so harmoniously. It will move from one problem to another, the whole world abreast. It will defeat the needs of the moment one at a time. Hunger? Everybody will be mobilized and will work on the feeding problem until the last hungry man is assured of food to the end of his days. But let him beware—beware," the teacher exclaimed, raising his arm high in the air, "if he does not justify that food by a perfect ability. Painless, sane elimination will end his days. He who does not want to be mobilized for the hunger war, who deserts the feeding front, is annihilated.

"What is the next problem? Work? The same principle. He who creates or produces, stays. He who lives by his wits and another fellow's stupidity or is lazy or undeveloped, goes out. Both of them for ever. Overproduction? So many are born every minute. So many will need this or that and the other thing for their average life. So much is made for them—no more. Education? For everybody to his heart's delight. And all this not for the sake of some silly idea of helping the other fellow, no," he exclaimed, lifting his hand, "for the Supreme Cooperation of the best of humanity—for Perfect Selection. What is not the best is removed from life. Don't shrink from that thought. Between the last war and this idea is a very short step.

"I understand that something very similar to my ideas has begun already. I've read about it somewhere. But as is always the case in a 'Compassionate' society, the idea has

begun in a weak and cowardly form. It's a new movement; 'birth-control,' they call it. Another bastard of Compassion. Humanity worries about the poor mothers who can not afford to have children. It is all wrong—that idea. We ought to protect all mothers so they could have as many children as they want. Prevent childbirth? Stupidity. Humanity might lose a genius and nobody would know it.

"No, not unborn souls, but souls born and proved useless should be exterminated. Three categories of them. The first one when the children are one year old: the cripple, the idiot, the undeveloped, should be wiped out. Then the second category at the age of fifteen, if they do not show any inclination toward creative ability or sharp curiosity in any line of human progress. The third and last 'perfect selection' comes at twenty-five years of age. By this time they should be able to show the world some achievement. Never mind what it is, but it must be their own, the first price of youth, the ticket to a parade of productive manhood and womanhood. If, by twenty-five, men or women do not have that ticket, why should they live and make the rest worry about them and waste time? Or wait until cholera or hunger or plague or another World War crudely relieves the world of a dozen million lives,—some useful too? No, I wouldn't prevent childbirth, but I would check individuals after birth. The unworthy, the uncreative, the drones—go out. Scientifically and painlessly, my friends. The moment we come to the conclusion that human pests are just as dangerous as rats or insects, there is nothing simpler than to begin to get rid of them."

"Who will judge what they are?" put in Alec.

"Who judged the ten commandments? The ten commandments which said '*don't* do this and *don't* do that, otherwise you'll burn in hell.' Soon some one will write hundreds of new commandments, saying '*do* this and *do* that.

Otherwise you can't go on living. Do it, not for yourself, but for the best around you.'

"Now we say 'don't steal,' but with modern commerce and the stock-exchange, that theory is pretty stale. That is the whole point." His voice jumped loudly out of the dark. "The theories we stand by at present are worn out, and new ones are just beginning to crystallize. But they do exist. They are in the air. They are right close to us. What is going on in Moscow is only the beginning. I see in the next two or three hundred years a great purification of humanity. Sentimentality will vanish. Silly kindness—heavenly love—compassion—all unnecessary appendices to modern times. It is an age of steel. Steel hearts will have to come to life. Wholesale extermination of every stale and selfish and undeveloped being on two legs will become a common thing. Extermination of parasites. Elimination of obstacles."

"I've heard Communists talking about extermination," said I.

"Psha-ah! Communists—they are only the forerunners. They still are the hangover of the same dead idea of Compassion. Poor exploited worker! Poor undernourished peasant!—and so forth. Building the world for feeble-minded under-dogs. Idiots! But at least they are new and fresh. Let them start. The final idea of supreme Cooperation of the choice bits of humanity is coming soon. We can't wait for it for long. . . . Believe me, I've thought it all out. It's steel logic."

We were nearing the Cavalry School. The light was getting gray, and all three of us were covered with three inches of snow.

"There's your street, Alec!" I said, pointing to the first side-street I saw.

"So it is!" He played up to me and jumped out of the sleigh.

“Thanks for the ride, comrade!” we shouted to the teacher who was already disappearing, sleigh, horse and all, in the thick falling snow. We heard his laugh. “Cooperation, comrades! Nothing else—just plain Cooperation. Good day!”

“Good day!” we answered to the smoothly whirling white wall of snowflakes streaming down from nowhere. We never saw the face of that man.

CHAPTER XXIV

TVER CAVALRY SCHOOL

"No."

Blankly unbelieving, Alec stared at Colonel Kutchin. At the very end, where he least expected it, Alec's dream was falling to pieces.

"The answer is no." The Commander of the Tver Cavalry School, sitting as if he had swallowed a yard-stick, looked at us with his strained watery eyes.

We were in the colonel's study, facing him in his arm-chair by the window overlooking the school grounds. One side of his face was lighted by the green shade of a desk lamp, the other by the tender and milky light of the snowy beginning of the day outside. It was half past seven in the morning. The colonel was shaved, dressed, had had his two glasses of tea and had already done two hours' work.

Drumming his fingers on his desk, he listened to Alec's argument, he weighed all his reasons, but we could not budge him.

"I understand everything you say, gentlemen." He was friendly but formal. "It is a great moment. It is a decisive moment. In times like this a man ought to make up his mind where he stands. And he ought to abide by his decision to the last drop of his blood. I confess that I, for one, have not been able to make up my mind. It is all over my head. But this much I do know: it is not for the cadets to help either side. I'm a soldier. All my life I've served the Emperor and Russia in the army. During the Japanese War I carried on with my boys from the first shot to the last.

Both my sons were in active service all through this war. I brought them up religiously to my own beliefs and I'm proud of them. I don't know where they are now."

"The Fish," we used to call him because of his watery eyes and his placid calm. Now he coughed loudly, trying to hide his emotion. But he went on, without changing his pose, or the even tone of his voice.

"When this war began, I was ready to do my duty again. But His Majesty ordered me to take command of the school and to bring you all up, you and the other young men—hundreds of you—to the best of my ability." His gaze slowly wandered over our faces, as if he saw in us all those who had passed before him on days of graduation, in long, straight, clinking, smart rows.

"... to bring you all up," he repeated, "worthy of the traditions of our Fatherland, our army and this school." In a sudden loud voice he shot out half-sentences. "I did my best. You know it."

We could not help calling out in reply, "We know it. We know it, Colonel. We adored you. There wasn't a cadet who wouldn't have jumped through a window at your command."

The colonel shook his head a little. "No matter what I do, I'll probably be accused of counter-revolutionary activity. Never mind. I'm ready ... I ..."

"Is that why you won't let the cadets go to Moscow, Colonel?" interrupted Alec quickly.

"That action is dictated by my own conscience and by nothing else. You ought to know me better. When I receive a command I don't reason, I do as I'm told. When there is nobody to give me orders, my conscience is my only superior. In the past I took my commands from the Emperor. Afterward, I took them from the Temporary Government, only because the last words of the Emperor's

abdication were,"—he recited them by heart, slowly and touchingly,—“We instruct our brother to rule the business of the State in full and permanent unity with the representatives of the people in lawful institutions on the principles which will be established by the same, having given his inviolate oath of allegiance in the name of our dearly beloved Fatherland. I call upon all faithful sons of the Fatherland to fulfill their sacred duty in this difficult time of the people's ordeal by helping him, together with the people's representatives, to guide the Russian Empire to the goal of victory, welfare and glory. Almighty God help Russia.’ I'm afraid nearly everybody else has overlooked those words. That is why we have all this insane turmoil. In those words lay the remedy for all dissension. The Emperor's last command was probably the wisest. Who commands me to-day? I don't know.”

“But, Colonel,” said Alec pleadingly.

“Wait, Lieutenant, wait. I tell you, I don't know. If you do know, act accordingly. I don't know. Therefore, all I've got to listen to is my conscience. I can not go into politics. It is all over my head. I can not tell which is right or wrong, even if I am more in sympathy with one side than the other. The last orders I recognized as lawful were: ‘Here are two hundred and fifty youngsters entrusted to you. Make for Russia the best soldiers out of them you can in the shortest possible time; honest, courageous, chivalrous, conscientious with their own men and foes alike. Make them love Russia so that they will defend its honor to the last breath of their lives. Make them understand their oath to the standard and their duty to the Fatherland.’”

The colonel pronounced the last words as if praying. There was more than conviction in them. It was a confession of the unblemished honesty of a soldier. Alec, eager to interrupt him, yet not quite daring to, hung his head.

It struck me suddenly that what the colonel had been drumming on the table for the last few minutes was a musical phrase, "ta ta-ta-tat ta ta ta." A bugle-call! I saw Alec trying to get it. Bugle-call for a charge. Cavalry on cavalry, in close formation, lances low, sabers out, field gallop from the start, officers ten horses ahead of the first row of men, singly against the bulk of the enemy. The bugle-call for the charge, "ta ta-ta-tat ta ta ta." Tears rolled down Alec's cheeks. The colonel's watery eyes disappeared behind a thick hanging moisture which he did not bother to wipe off. Only his voice became weaker.

"I don't know where my next command will come from. I don't know what it will be. Meantime, I can not send my boys to die for something which is not clear to me or, as a matter of fact, to either fighting side. They are blinded by rage. I believe in the wisdom of my country, and my country alone. Not personalities, but the country as a whole. It is in trouble now. The trouble will pass. Dissension will end. Calm reasoning will be restored. Every young, energetic and honest man will be needed. Whatever the dispute is about, it will have to be decided without my cadets. Their job has not yet arrived."

We sat in silence for a while.

Alec tried again. "The White forces are so small, Colonel. Six or seven thousand at the outside. Only half of them have any military training. Infantry cadets, officers, a few hundred faithful soldiers. The rest civilians and students. Their losses are heavy. The fight is desperate. Our objective is the same as yours, Colonel. The good of the country. All parties are united against the Reds, even the Socialists."

"Who is fighting on the other side?" asked the Colonel.

"Lenin, Trotsky, Uritsky, Zinovieff, Unshlicht—all assumed names—not Russian, Muraviev—Muralov, one a renegade police lieutenant, the other a clerk."

"No, I'm asking who's doing the fighting—the actual fighting?"

"People, former soldiers, workers, sailors. All dragged into the insurrection."

"Many of them?"

"Swarms."

"Russia?"

Alec did not answer.

"Russia?" the Colonel repeated.

Alec whispered with difficulty, "It must be Russia."

Silence fell again. The colonel looked through the window. A platoon of cadets was returning from the riding ring. They marched through the white stretch of grounds in twos, swinging their arms uniformly and leaving behind them a path in the snow, straight as a ruler. An officer came out of the building, walking toward them. The cadet-sergeant gave a command. Arms stopped swinging as if cut off. Steps became sharp and precise. Heads jerked to a full left turn toward the officer and stayed there until he had gone by, holding his palm to his visor. Another command. Arms swung. Heads returned to the straight position. The cadet-sergeant pirouetted like a dancer, left about face while walking, and continued to walk backward. We heard his young voice faintly through the closed window.

"One—two, one—two."

He faced about again and smartly caught the step of the first pair.

The colonel turned away from the window. "My decision is unshaken, gentlemen. If you go back, tell it to those who sent you. If you want to, you can stay here in the school as long as you find it necessary and as long as you obey my orders." He added after a while, "You'd better have your meals here in my house."

We thanked him, shook his hand, unable to tell him how

desperately we wanted to be once more down there on the parade ground with the cadets, with the consciousness that he was watching us from the chair by the window with his keen watery eyes.

Once outside his quarters, we stood looking into the slowly floating snowflakes, both of us in an agony of emotion, Alec much worse than I. He was crushed; for him the world had come to an end. He had been so sure of the success of our errand, so certain that a body of highly trained fighters would inspire the doubting and turn the tide. He had expected to ride back to Moscow leading the charge. Some difficulty he had foreseen, but it had never entered his head that the colonel would be his first and last insurmountable obstacle. But Alec was a soldier and could take orders. As a youngster he had taken his first order from the colonel; he had learned to obey him. Against him, revolt or disobedience was unthinkable. The habit of years was stronger than his intelligence and the fury of his political convictions.

To me, the colonel's attitude presented a different aspect. I saw then the futility of the struggle, how aimless was the discharge of fury, violence and vengeance on both sides. Much later I learned that on both sides the ideologists, the reasoning leaders, took no part in the physical struggle. Lenin, on the cruiser *Aurora*, was writing his articles; Miliukoff, at home, the never used Constitution of Republican Russia. These two men headed the two camps. The camps fought; the leaders thought. The outcome of the fight was left to Fate. Fate was obvious and trivial; it decided for the majority. The actual fighters were forgotten by both sides almost as soon as the fight ended. Those who commanded the Red forces in October in Moscow had no share in the creative construction of Communistic Russia or in the feverish rebuilding of its life. Three months after the Moscow insurrection, nothing was heard of Muraviev and

Muralov, who carried it through so directly on their shoulders. Their work done, they vanished into insignificant government offices. The Whites and their leaders scattered all over the world; lost, forgotten ghosts of their former selves. New people appeared in Russia. Never heard of before, they began to rule and to issue decrees. These did not want to bother with the dirty work of physical struggle which, though smothered, continued to glow like fire under ashes. They shifted it to Cheka, the Extraordinary Committee. And even then, the Central Committee of the Communistic Party did not choose to hear about its ways or means. "The dirty work is necessary; let it remain in dirty hands," I heard the more sensitive among them saying, half apologetically. But all that came later.

At present I knew that Moscow was lost, that the people of Russia were getting what they wanted, that Alec and myself were on the doomed side.

We moved slowly and silently about the grounds. We sat under the stable wall and watched the regular activities of the school going on. Everything was quiet and normal, as if it were only yesterday that we were walking in and out of these buildings, clinking our spurs. The only irregular circumstance was that we were not molested. In our day, two civilians would not have been allowed on the grounds. We guessed at what was going on in the manège and exercise building. We saw horses, steaming like locomotives, led out by cadets after practise. Horses neighed. Cadets talked loud. One cadet tried to catch a falling snowflake with his open mouth. The others laughed at him. A young cadet, smart and lean, stood at attention before us.

"The colonel wishes to see you, gentlemen officers. In the dining-room," he reported snappily. We got up, shook off the snow and followed him. For the first time we were conscious of our untidy old civilian clothes. Striding along with

us, the cadet looked like a Christmas tree next to a couple of logs destined to be burned in the fireplace. On our way we heard the bugle blowing assembly for the midday meal. Through the familiar double door we turned to the right into the big assembly hall, hung with innumerable portraits of the cadets, officers and generals graduated from the school during its century of existence. Two squadrons of cadets, under the command of a cadet sergeant-major, stood on each side of the hall, in two rows,—a regular assembly formation. No officers were present. The moment we crossed the threshold the cadet sergeant-major shouted:

"Atten-shun! . . . First squadron. . . . Right! Second squadron. . . . Left!"

The rows of cadets tightened as if pulled by strings. I felt faint and weak. Alec was as white as the snow on his shoulders. The cadet sergeant-major approached us and reported in clear-cut speedy words.

"The sergeant-major of the Tver Cavalry School has the honor to report: two squadrons of cadets present; on duty, twelve; under arrest, none; in the hospital, one."

I was older in rank than Alec. I had to answer. I don't know how I said, "Thanks, Sergeant-Major." It wasn't correct either. Regulations did not call for gratitude after the report. I managed to get out loudly, "Good day, cadets."

Two hundred and fifty young throats burst into a measured simultaneous explosion of the regulation words:

"We—wish—you health—your honor."

"At ease. . . ."

Dead silence. We did not know what to do. The colonel had probably told the boys who we were and had withdrawn to give us a chance to greet the cadets. In his presence, or in the presence of any other officer of senior rank, we could not have done that. According to regulation, all activity belonged to the senior officer.

So we stood tense, with pounding hearts, struggling with all the memories of the past, with all the blows of the present, with pain pulling and stretching our nerves until we wanted to sob like children.

The sergeant-major was signaling to me vigorously with his eyes. The colonel and two officers were standing by the entrance. It was my turn to give the command. I snapped:

"Atten-shun! First squadron. . . . Right! Second squadron. . . . Left!" I took three steps. "Lieutenant of the First Regiment of Polish Lancers has the honor to report: two squadrons of cadets of the Tver Cavalry School present; on duty, twelve; under arrest, none; in the hospital, one."

The colonel stood at attention. His watery eyes shifted to the cadet sergeant-major. "Sergeant! March the cadets to the dining hall."

"First squadron. . . . Right! Second squadron. . . . Right! Forward. . . . March! Atten-shun! Left!"

Thum. Thum. Thum. Thum. The echo repeated the thumping of feet.

Clang. Clang. Clang. The spurs jingled gently. The colonel whispered to us: "Remember, not a word about your mission. I gave them an excuse for your presence and your civilian clothes. I wish you good appetite, gentlemen."

We had our meal in our old places, Alec and I. Though we were both hungry, we could hardly swallow. But we could not refuse hospitality. The colonel and the officers withdrew again and the cadets took the warmest care of us. Our plates were filled to the brim. Cups of tea could not be emptied. We answered endless questions, but none was asked about political news, probably by the colonel's order. Young, healthy, shining faces flashed before our eyes, inspired with the desire to make us comfortable.

The meal over, grace was sung. Then they all gathered around us. Each one wanted to shake hands and exchange a

few words. What horse did we ride while in the school? What bed did we sleep in? What number carbine was ours—and saber? I remembered my saber: eleven, eleven, twelve—
11-11-12.

"It's mine! It's mine!" shouted an excited voice, and a cadet, blond and pink, with buck teeth, pushed himself to the front and shook my hand again and again. He ran out and brought his saber from the rack. "Here it is—see—here it is," he shouted, pointing to the engraved figures on the steel: 11-11-12. It was my saber.

"You take good care of it," I said to please him.

"Oh, Lieutenant, you bet I do! I cut the dummy in half with one swish! Ask them all." He turned to his chums. "Do I? Tell him—do I?"

"He does—yes—he does. He's swell with the saber," responded forty voices.

I gave the boy back his saber. Alec got up. I saw from his eyes that he would not be able to stand much more. So I began to make our excuses and to bid the nearest good-by. But it was not so easy:

"Oh, you don't want to go yet. . . . Stay with us. . . . We have field exercises to-morrow. . . . Why don't you ride with us? There are plenty of beds in the hospital. . . . The colonel said you'd stay with us. . . . Oh, please, Lieutenant. . . ."

But it was no use. Like Alec, I felt I'd have to cut this thing off. For ever and at once. It was a thing of the past anyhow. It was something that happens once in a lifetime, never repeats itself and never vanishes from one's memory.

"We've got to go. We have orders. I can't say anything more." That was understood.

The cadet sergeant-major shouted, topping the whole bunch:

"Cadets, *Allah-ver-dy* to our guests. Come on, *Allah-ver-dy*."

With strong voices, all the boys burst into a swinging rhythm. Standing closely around us, holding one another's hands, they sang the old army song of hospitality.

Allah-ver-dy is of Caucasian origin. Mohammedans in the Caucasus sing it at every feast. It spread through the regiments stationed among them, and became the most popular song of friendship, camaraderie and tradition among the officers. It is a song of warmth and loyalty with an Oriental heart-tug. A song of promises one does not forget, of the romanticism of *A Thousand and One Nights*, of the chivalry of combatants who feast together before the last bloody struggle. All the emotional side of that word "honor," which sounds silly and out of place to-day.

"Allah-ver-dy! God be with you.
Allah-ver-dy! God be with you."

The chorus rings in our ears with the force of thundering youth. The echo of it, hushed by the stone walls and vaulted ceiling, reverberates, slow and melancholy, like funeral bells:

"Every guest is a gift to the host
From Allah in heaven,—
Praised be his holy name.
And it matters little from what shores
The guest has come to our table,
Messenger of Allah,
He will praise his holy name.
Welcome guest, in gold or rags
Poor or rich—a friend or foe.
Your heart is ours and our hearts are yours
Allah-ver-dy! Allah-ver-dy!"

Alec and I march away from the Tver Cavalry School. We will never see it again and we will never hear *Allah-ver-dy* any more.

CHAPTER XXV

MEMORIES

TO GO back to the passenger station in the daylight is too dangerous; the junction seven miles away would be safer; we'll have to walk there by a round-about way. We walk in silence, watching each other closely from under our eyelids, waiting to see which will break first. Alec keeps wrinkling his forehead and taking off his cap, only to put it right back on again. In the white fields the sparsely scattered farmhouses are partly blotted out by lace curtains of snow. The houses are small, poor and squatted low on the ground, each guarded by a single naked tree. Their uneven thatched and shingle roofs seem to droop under two feet of snow, and the windows look tiny, half buried behind the white banks. The road is marked by a single set of sleigh furrows. I walk in the one on the right, Alec in that on the left. We plow along so fast that I am covered with sweat; my wet shirt feels cold on my back. We never look behind us. We do not need to. We know the neighborhood of the school by heart, each house, each field and ditch and path. We have scanned it so many times during maneuvers; so many times we have put it on our practise maps.

In four years nothing has changed. It seems to me that I can even recognize separate sticks in the crude cattle fences. I am sure that on some of them I will find the initials I carved with a pocket knife during maneuvers. The road ahead curves to the west, at an angle of seventy-five degrees. I remember measuring it. There will be a small wooden bridge over a shallow ditch with spring water in it, and the

road will fork. One branch will go over the bridge, and the other, parallel, under it, through the ditch. In the summer the peasants used to water their horses here. Once, when still a freshman on reconnaissance practise, I set out to fool the seniors of the opposing army. I hid my horse in the bushes and crawled under the bridge to spy on the enemy's movements. The bridge was not more than two feet above the water. I squeezed myself close to the end where it rested on some half rotten logs, and waited. The enemy's patrol thundered over my head. "Ah," I thought. "Going south, ten riders strong. We'll mark that. . . ."

"Hey, you lizard, get out from under there," I heard a voice above me.

"What the hell?" Furious and ashamed, I crawled out.

"Chop off your legs next time you hide under this bridge, rider. How tall are you?"

"Six feet," I answer.

"And this bridge is four and a half wide. Your boots were sticking out eighteen inches. I thought at first it was a dead cow. I wasn't far wrong," the bright senior concluded haughtily, pinning a blue band on me, which meant that I was a prisoner and had to walk to headquarters to face the supercilious smiles of other seniors.

Sometimes the seniors played worse tricks on us. Another time during maneuvers, three of us, Alec, Nika, son of the professor of ballistics, and I, were tempted to take a swim in the river about three miles beyond the school. The senior "enemies" spotted us and stole our horses and clothes. All they left us were three unsheathed sabers stuck in the ground, on each a handkerchief and cap, and three pairs of boots with spurs. They thought this funny. We had to get back to school for dinner. After whistling for a while without any result, we created bathing suits, as best we could, out of caps and handkerchiefs, put the boots on and started trot-

ting to the school, swinging our sabers. Picking our way through the bushes and woods we burst upon a group of peasant girls gathering mushrooms. They fell flat on their faces and screamed at the top of their voices. We also jumped out on a picnic party in a meadow, sending them scurrying behind the trees, all except one old grandmother, who sat immovable next to a lunch basket, holding it with both hands, and blinking at us with calm and curious eyes. Over the spread plaids, table-cloths and plates we leaped, and made the back gate of the school in time.

The senior cadet on guard there had been warned about three naked freshmen, and directed us to the stable where we found our uniforms, just as the bugle sounded for dinner. We were lucky, at that, not to meet any officers. We changed in a hurry and took our places in the ranks ready to file in, but the officer in command took one look at us and said, "March to the bath-house, take a shower and comb your hair." In the excitement, we had forgotten our wet hair that stuck up on all sides, a serious offense at the cadet school. Every senior in the ranks was biting his lips as we marched off to the bath-house. We were very clean that day, but we'd have missed dinner if the seniors hadn't hidden it for us. And for good measure, they gave us their desserts. We had earned them. We supplied the laughs for a whole week.

But sometimes we got even. That time in Alona's house. We'll get to it soon; we won't be able to see it from the road; it used to lie about a hundred yards beyond the railroad embankment. In our freshman year, Alec and I rode, carefully hidden, behind this embankment, in search of enemy outposts. We did not expect to find any on this side of the junction. The maneuver problem was an attack on the junction from the other side, and we were making an encircling reconnaissance only to obey the regulations. A cadet with a

white band represented a field battery; with red, a squadron of cavalry; with green, a battalion of infantry.

As we rode abreast of Alona's house I said, "Alec, hold my horse. I'll crawl up and see if there's anything in there." We did not know then that this was the famous Alona's house. I stuck my head above the embankment and nearly fell on my back. Six cadets' horses stood in the shade, a little beyond the house. Alec and I formed ourselves into a military council. Six seniors in the house. Oh, what luck! But it wasn't all pie. The moment we showed up and announced to the seniors that they were our prisoners, they would as likely as not turn us over on their knees and spank us hard. And if we demanded their arm-bands in token of surrender, they would throw us out with obscene curses sweetly spoken. There would be no way to convince the seniors that they were really our prisoners. We couldn't squeal to the officers; our maneuvers were conducted without ammunition, and we couldn't very well chop them with sabers. Even so, they were six. What to do? We conceived a plan.

Like Indians, we wiggled on our bellies to the horses in the shade, and stole all six saddles. Alec piled them up on my horse, rode half a mile away and hid them while I watched the house from behind the trees. I heard young laughing voices and the singing ring of a guitar. Directly, a stately woman in a clean snow-white waist and a plaid homespun skirt came out, went to a cellar dug in the ground, and carried back a large earthenware jug. Again she went to the cellar, and as she brought out another jug, I noticed how shining her black hair was against her dark lovely face. She was barefoot, and walked on her toes. Her breasts were wide apart. Once she laughed toward the open window in a low contralto tone. I nearly forgot that I was watching God knows how many batteries, squadrons and battalions of the enemy. "Lucky dogs," I thought. Then Alec came

back and we proceeded with the execution of our plan. We crawled to the front door and, with the horses' halters, tied the latch fast. Saber unleashed, I went up to the only open window. Then Alec ran around the house like a Comanche Indian, waving his saber, guarding the other windows.

"Come on, gentlemen cadets, hand me your bands," I yelled.

I was greeted by an outburst of laughter—a bit confused, though. "Come on in here and get them," they invited.

"Think we're fools?" I snapped. "Come on. Hurry up. We've got your saddles hidden. No use trying the door. The latch is tied fast. And if any one of you sticks your head through the window, I'll chop it off. As sure as I'm in the first platoon of the second squadron, I'll chop it off." I was trying vainly to convince myself, by a desperate loud voice, that I would really do it.

The laughter died; except the woman's. I heard her teasing the seniors. Then she looked out the window and smiled. Her teeth were small and even, as if they had been filed.

A cadet's voice spoke nonchalantly, "Want my dessert for a week?"

"Not for a month."

"How about dinner at the Merchants' Hotel on Sunday?"

"Eat it yourself. Come on, give me your band."

Suddenly one cadet leaped up and began to squeeze himself through a small window. "Alec!" I yelled. Alec, ready with a wooden bucket full of water, splashed it straight in the cadet's face. He was half-way out of the window. I jumped up and tore off his band. It was green. I had captured a battalion of infantry.

"Hurrray!" we shouted.

The senior came up to us, shaking off the water. I hid the band in my pocket.

“All right, all right,” he said. “You’re swell cavalrymen. Want a cigarette?”

“Alec, watch the other side!” I screamed. Through the open window I saw that the cadets were crowding to another window across the room. Alec ran around. I followed him. One cadet was already out and had darted to the shade where the horses stood. Another stuck with one leg and one arm through the window. A red band. “Hurrray!” we yelled again, and plunged at him. This time Alec captured the squadron of enemy cavalry. The cadet by the horses was trying to untie his horse, but we had taken care to tie all the reins together in one double knot. That cadet was a field battery. This we captured together.

But we weren’t through yet. One senior had now opened the door so that we still faced two battalions of infantry and one more battery. Our backs were to the wall, more so because the captured battalion, squadron and battery suddenly decided that they had not been captured at all. They surrounded us, set to annihilate two nasty freshmen, even if our red bands showed that we were two squadrons of cavalry.

We lifted our sabers. “Keep away, gentlemen seniors. Keep away,” Alec growled. I spat on my palm and held the saber’s handle tight.

The seniors wore their caps, but they had left their sabers inside the house. Their tunics were unbuttoned. They had just got up from a light bite of two dozen scrambled eggs and two jugs of fresh milk, which they had consumed in Alona’s house between their regular breakfast and the mid-day meal at school, and they were raging bulls.

One of them, nicknamed “General” for his important air and up-stage manner, took command. “Bring out the sabers, gentlemen!” He tried to scare us. Two cadets ran inside and brought out the six sabers. I spread my legs wide apart

and unbuttoned my collar. Not easily would I give up the battalion of infantry in my pocket. Alec was warming up, swinging his saber like a propeller, with a rotating movement of the wrist. He was a good fencer. I could hardly see the whirling blade.

"Six against two goes with me," he said.

"Don't take more than three at a time, Alec," I put in my joke. "Give me a chance."

The seniors, rather sulky and not at all happy that they had started all this, spread before us as though they were the blades of a fan.

"For the last time," declaimed the General, "we'll let you go free with all you've got if you give us back our saddles and beat the hell out of here."

"Come nearer, General, and I'll answer you," I shouted.

They knew and I knew that if this fight started, we'd all wind up under arrest on bread and water for a month—not counting a couple of cuts or bruises. And for that reason the warming up before the battle would continue endlessly—and it gave me pleasure to tease them. Alec knew it too, and like Cyrano de Bergerac, played with the saber and cracked jokes.

"I'll puncture your stomach, General, and spill that milk you drank," he laughed.

"Swelled-headed pup. I dare you to make one thrust at me."

"If I did, you wouldn't see it." And as good as his word, Alec flashed the saber in a double thrust, "body left—head right" in the air, too fast for any eye to catch.

The other seniors also began to swing their sabers. There was a distance of ten steps between us.

"That will cut your ears off," said one.

"After you find yours in the grass," I answered, and did my best to slaughter the air around me.

All eight of us were swinging our sabers, still ten steps apart, not moving a foot nearer.

"Hold on to your pants. There goes one for you." The red-headed and freckled cadet called "Fire House" showed off a complicated thrust to Alec.

"No good!" jeered Alec.

"That's for you!"

"Not enough. How'd you like this?"

"Is that all the speed you've got?"

"Plenty for you."

"Say, you think you've got a rolling pin in your hand?"

"That would cut you in four pieces."

"Four of you is what I need to make me happy."

Sabers swished and whirled. We pranced back and forth. But the distance of ten paces remained unchanged. Warming up changed into boiling up. We began to get tired of our exhibition. Perspiration dripped from our faces.

"Take this!" Swish.

"How about your nose?" Swish. Swish.

"Say, you think you could cut a frankfurter in two?" Swish.

"I can cut an ass like you lengthwise." Thrust. Cut. Swish.

"Why aren't you skipping rope in kindergarten, you babies?" The General, panting, leaned on his saber. Alec immediately made two lunges toward him, and in spite of the distance, the General instinctively picked up his saber and began to swing again.

"Come on, come on! Cry for your mama," I yelled at a senior called "Mountainpeak." He was four feet ten high, and held his ground firmly, ten yards away from me.

"Alona!" he piped up. "Lend him your skirt to hide under."

Alona was watching the whole performance from the

window. She was laughing heartily, and her laugh did not sound right in the seniors' ears. Not much heroism in six against two, with the risk of arrest and an audience with old "Fish." But the thing was started, and good cavalry cadets had to go through with it. On the other side, Alec and I felt very heroic indeed. We pranced like roosters and grinned proudly at Alona. But it seemed to me that she never took her eyes off Alec.

The General took voice again. "Well, I guess we'll have to talk business now," he announced without batting an eye. "I'm all ready. We won't six of us fight you two. One will be enough."

Alec interrupted, "Yes, for a kick in the pants, one'll be enough. What about my saber?"

The General condescended graciously, "All right. Two of us if you want to get a speedy thrashing. We'll draw lots."

We were glad enough to rest from swinging our blades. Alec saluted smartly to Alona in the window, "Can I get a drink, beautiful?"

"Indeed you can, my little lord." She beamed and disappeared inside. In a second she was out with a jug and two glasses. As Alec drank the cold milk, his eyes were smiling at Alona. I guarded him, with my saber ready.

Fire House made two steps toward us. "No game," I yelled, thinking that he wanted to catch us unprepared.

"No game," answered Fire House. "I am a gentleman," he added. "Give me some milk too, Alona." He extended his hand for a glass. I drank from another, and handed it to the General, who also came into the group with the rest.

"No game—no game," they all repeated, approaching. In turn we all gulped milk and chatted with Alona.

"My, my, but you are angry warriors," she said. "You couldn't really fight each other, could you?"

"Oh, yes, we could," replied Mountainpeak, his upper lip covered with thick milk. "We've got to teach these freshmen."

"Wipe the milk off your whiskers," came from me.

Alona laughed. "Why don't you all come inside together, sit down, rest and have something to eat, like good boys?"

"Oh, no. Oh, no, Alona," cut in the General, finishing the milk straight from the jug. "We've got to finish this controversy. The gentlemen freshmen don't seem to know their places. We'll just point it out to them. . . ."

"And occupy it yourself," Alec finished for him, and again saluted Alona smartly. "How much do I owe you for the whole jug? Allow me, gentlemen." He turned to the seniors. "It is on me."

The seniors grunted. It would be bad manners to refuse a treat from the foe.

"Twenty coppers," said Alona.

Smirking at her, Alec handed her half a ruble.

"Thank you, my little lord," she said, her eyes getting suddenly dim and languid. She did not move away while the seniors drew lots and discussed the terms of the encounter. Two against two. No thrusts. The first cap knocked off wins. If we lost, we held on to the captured battalion, squadron and battery. If we won, we got another battalion, squadron and battery, and gave the seniors back their saddles.

The lots fell to the General and Fire House. The rest congratulated them. The General stuck out his chest and clapped himself on the ribs. Fire House was non-committal.

"All right with me," was all he said.

Suddenly Alona grew fearful. Her eyes wide and serious, she asked, "You're not going to fight, gentlemen? It would be foolish. You might hurt each other," and stepped in

between us. "Please—please, falcons dear." She switched to a singing peasant dialect, and looking into our eyes, she clutched the jug to her breast. Her dark, gipsy face puckered as though she might burst into tears.

"No, no, Alona. Don't interfere. This is a man's affair," the General soothed her. "We've got to finish it."

"But you are not going to slash at each other with those sabers, like a bunch of Tartars, are you?" Alona insisted, placing herself in front of Alec.

"Yes, we are going to, Alona, but we know how to do it. All we'll aim at is to knock off their caps, and we'll be through in a minute," argued the General.

"Even less than a minute," I reassured her too.

"I don't think I'll let you. Forgive me, young gentlemen, I won't let you. I'll stay right between you. You'll have to slash me too. Oh, please—please, my dearest, I'm scared. I'll run to the junction and tell your officers. Please, my little lord," she turned to Alec, "I'll be praying for you, my nearest friend, my little sun." Again she switched to the peasant singsong and looked at Alec eagerly with a dog-like plea.

He put his hand on her shoulder, and her teeth closed, but her mouth remained half open. "Don't be scared, Alona. Will you believe me—will you—if I tell you that it's all right? We won't use the thrusts. We practise every day. And if you interfere, we'll go through with it in the woods anyhow. Maybe we'll get a scratch, maybe we won't, but we've got to go on now. We're cadets. Will you stand aside and believe me that nobody's going to get hurt? Will you believe me?"

"I believe you, my little lord," answered Alona, as if under a charm.

Alec's gray eyes smiled at her, as he led her out to the bench under the window. We took places opposite the two

seniors, tested the ground and got a good hold on our saber grips. The sun was high and did not shine in our eyes. Our shadows on the ground were no larger than the leaves of rhubarb growing near the shade. It was hot, and butterflies on daisies and bachelor's-buttons moved their wings slowly, fanning themselves. I pulled my cap tight over my head. Alec smoothed his back in a reckless fashion. The General faced me, and Fire House, Alec.

"Ready?" asked the falsetto of Mountainpeak, and he went up on his toes. "Start!" He swished through the air with his saber and turned himself around on his heel. All four of us saluted quickly, and the General made the first lunge. I caught it easily and nearly fooled him with a slash to the left, reversing it to the right. He parried it with a seconde, and began to crowd me with septimes. Left, right. Left, right. I had to look out for my cap. I backed up two steps to get rid of the short embracing cuts of the General's blade. I was dripping wet. The General was a good quick fencer. He was just as tall as I, and his arms were longer. My slight retreat encouraged him. He began to play with me, and used trick cuts. But I had one up my sleeve too. It was a straight chop on the dome of the opponent's head, with a quick twist around, the parrying blade held horizontally, and a final slash at the neck. I decided to use it, aiming at the cap instead of at the neck, and waited for an opening. It came with the General's slash at my thigh. I parried by a side jump and swung the blade in a broad move down upon the General's head. He was in time to parry it. I encircled the end of his saber and nearly knocked his cap off. But the General was faster than I. He caught my saber with a back thrust and it fell to the ground a few yards away from me. The General lifted it and quickly handed it back to me. To let a foe pick up a dropped weapon or cap was against the code. I looked around. Alec and Fire

House, with the rest, were watching us, leaning on the sabers.

"We were through long ago," said Alec, "but you two were so absorbed that you didn't see us and we didn't want to disturb you. It was a good fight, General." He extended his hand.

"Did you lose too?" I asked Alec.

"Oh, hell!" exclaimed Fire House, "he got my cap off with the first lunge. You were entitled to the bands anyhow. Here's mine." He handed Alec his "battery."

The others gave us their bands. We returned their saddles and helped to put them on the horses. All seven of us galloped away. Alec stayed behind for a minute, bending down to Alona, who stood by his stirrup, looking up at him. Lying on his horse's neck, he galloped off to join us, and she walked after him as if trying not to lose his image disappearing in the dust.

That was Alec's first meeting with Alona. Many hours during maneuvers and on leave, he spent in her house. In this there was nothing irregular. Alona made a good living by renting rooms to cadets for their Sunday leave.

The only possible hotel in town was drab, with worn-out carpets, dusty potted palms and spotted wall-paper. The cadets went there on Saturday and stayed until Sunday night, playing cards, drinking, writing letters home. When they left the hotel, they swore not to come back again, but the next Sunday they returned once more, because Alona could not accommodate more than eight overnight, and besides, as a rule, she was choosy and let in only the boys she liked. She did not allow card-playing, but she used to tell our fortunes with tea leaves, melted wax and coffee grounds. When at her house, we did not want to play cards or drink much. We listened endlessly to her singing. She knew all the gipsy and folk songs, and each one of us had his

favorite. Over and over we asked her to repeat them, and joined her in the chorus. Even more than the songs, we liked Alona to talk to us, to tell us old stories and tales. Her language was rich and melodious. Whenever she got excited or told a story, she switched to an emotional singsong quality and the caressing Volodimir brogue. Otherwise her speech was not untaught, but constantly sprinkled with soft and picturesque peasant similes and adjectives.

The first few months in school were hard on the boys. New surroundings, rigid discipline, rough treatment, absolute obedience, seniors' pranks, all that made many youngsters sigh and look sad on Sundays. For these, especially, Alona smiled, poured glass after glass of milk, patted shoulders, or listened attentively to stories about home.

Her old aunt did most of the housework, but Alona had her eye on everything, the special dishes she cooked herself. Nobody else could equal her for suckling pig with buckwheat stuffing, or "pelmeni," small meat-pies in delicious bouillon. She had two cows; plenty of milk, cheese and butter. Her aunt baked the bread in a large Russian stove in the center of the big room. It was always fresh, and on Saturdays, hot. But all this we could have found somewhere else. We didn't go there for the food but for Alona herself. After all, we were still boys, and especially those of us who came from distant provinces sometimes felt pretty lonely. We could find plenty of girls of all sorts. They were merely girls. What we enjoyed most was the mature feminine grace and care of Alona.

She did not mix with the neighboring peasants or town-folk. Nobody knew where she came from, or when she had arrived, or why she lived alone on two acres of land with her aunt, a deaf and dumb old witch. She might have been twenty-five years old, but she looked younger. The cadets ranged from seventeen to twenty-four, and acted

fourteen. Her house had one spacious room and one bedroom with four large beds in it, and in this bedroom we used to sleep, sometimes two of us in a bed. Alona had a room in the attic and her aunt slept in a small cubbyhole next the summer kitchen in an annex.

Alona was by temperament a mother. A mother who could play the guitar and sing, and was always beautiful, who smiled approval, but found no fault, whose judgment we did not fear, who gave and never took, who welcomed us but never waited up for us. And since we paid for our food and room, she put us under no obligation.

And there was a hint of sex. We whispered about romances she had had with this cadet or the other in earlier years. Maybe she had. On the walls of her house were many photographs of cadets, with various inscriptions: "To Alona—with gratitude for the sweetest milk I ever drank. Senia." "Alona—lilac blossoms—a guitar—twelfth of May—yours always, Speedy." "Thanks, thanks, my dear, for everything. 'The Black Hussar.'"

"Our fire lights the mist,
The sparks disappear in flight
Nobody'll be on the bridge
To see your scarf untied. Serge."

In our youthful way, we were all in love with her. A strange kind of love, because if a boy said to Alona, "I love you," she would answer with dignity, "Thank you, sir," and ask the cadets not to bring that boy again. You couldn't pay her for love; it never occurred to us to do so. You could not court her or flirt with her. She was so much wiser than any of us. You could be grateful and you could be friendly—that was all. But we showered her with gifts, tips for the old aunt, and tender letters, written in classes in ballistics, hippology or strategy.

Her only love-affair in our time was that with Alec.

Every one knew about it, and every one respected it. Except in a casual way, Alec never mentioned her name. We asked no questions. Later, during the war, he seemed to forget about her completely. I know I never once heard him speak of her. While in school, he was probably a little ashamed of loving a peasant girl. He could not help the deep, young and strong emotion, and did not know how to cope with it. Toward him, Alona behaved with dignity and delicacy. The only difference she made with Alec was that from the very first day she called him "my little lord." She never used that for any one else. Otherwise, she was as polite and kind but as aloof with him as with the others. When we were graduated, Alec, in his new uniform of the Wild Division, went to say good-by to her. No one else did, though each of us wrote to her.

The last time I had seen her was from the train window. She stood in front of her house, tall and erect, with a black bandanna tied over her head, a black woolen shawl over her shoulders, her arms hanging limply and her eyes scanning the coaches flashing by. I waved my hand. Alec stood behind me. Alona did not raise her arm, did not move. Only her head and her large dark eyes turned, and we watched until we could not see her any more. Alec, his lips tight, did not say a word during that whole trip to Moscow.

I notice that Alec walks faster and faster. At last we are in that spot where we had paused before our adventure of capturing the whole sham army in the persons of six seniors. Behind the railroad embankment is Alona's house. The past flashes before me incredibly fast, and I wonder if I should remind Alec that Alona's house is so near. But Alec slows down and finally stands still.

"Would you mind stopping at Alona's, Father?" he asks me, looking straight into my eyes.

"Not at all," I answer.

CHAPTER XXVI

ALEC AND ALONA

A KNOCK on the door.

"Who's there?" comes from within. Alona's voice.

"Open the door, please." Alec's voice is dull. The latch clackety-clacks, and the door opens. Alona, tall and strong, is standing on the threshold, not much changed, but thinner than she used to be, and paler. Her dark skin is yellow cream now, and the red color of her cheeks is gone. The eyes are the same, dark and wide apart. The mouth, too, slightly open and bright. For a full minute she stands motionless, her eyes glued to Alec's face. Numb and staring, they look dead—gone. Such life as is left is waiting for the heavy eyelids to drop slowly and bury it. It seems to me that nothing can keep those long, dark, trembling eyelashes from closing for ever over the pain in Alona's eyes. "She is passing out," I think, and I am afraid to move, to disturb the frozen struggle in the two dark shining circles. But Alona is strong, and her face changes from tender yellow to glowing red. Her eyes begin to burn and to devour each detail of Alec's face and appearance. She turns her head in a slight sway following her own gaze, as if she wanted to smooth out with her sight his wrinkles, his tightly shut lips, the veins pulsating on his temples. She notices his torn old overcoat, and pushes the door wider. Now in the darkness of the room, by the stove, I can see the old aunt, holding a rifle ready.

"Alona," says Alec. "How are you, Alona?"

"My little lord," comes from the half-opened lips. "My

little lord . . . oh, God!" She moves slowly to him, takes his arm, brings it up and lays her cheek on it as though it were a pillow. Without turning her head, she kisses the edge of his palm again and again. "Oh, God!" is all she says.

"Uhm, uhm, uhm." I hear grunts at my side. The old aunt, rifle still in her hand, sticks her toothless gums at me and shakes her head up and down to show that she recognizes us.

"How are you, your honor?" Alona whispers to me.

I give her my hand and she shakes it. Her fingers are icy cold. Suddenly she snatches her hand away from mine and grasps her breast, pressing hard, as though pushing her whole body against it. A sob—a half-choked yell breaks from her. It comes from her like a mother's birth-pain scream when she, with a last effort, pushes the child out of herself. Before the yell dies in the air, the cry of the newborn baby blends with it and smothers it with its force and will to live. In the same way, Alona's first sob is replaced by tender and ringing mutterings of love words and happiness babbling in short cries from her lips. She throws her arms around Alec and, tears running down her cheeks, lays deep, long kisses on his eyes, his forehead, his cheeks, his mouth.

"You've come back——" Her breath catches. "You've come back, my little lord, come back." It is almost a chant. "Oh, my heart, my sweet, my star in heaven, my little lord on earth, I love you—I love you. Your shiny gray eyes are tired. Look into my soul, dearest, rest in my soul, my nearest. It will hold you—it will lull you—it loves you. Oh, if I could only tell you how it loves you! My snow-white, my sky-deep, my sun-bright little lord. . . ." Her voice is high and hushed like that of a bird singing in its sleep. Her kisses become longer and slower.

For the first time since we got off the train in Moscow,

I see Alec smile. His face all one red blush, he pats Alona on the back and whispers something to her. He lays his forehead on hers and looks into her eyes. The aunt pulls Alona by the skirt, and grunting, points to the door. Wind is blowing snow into the room. Alona laughs, tears still on her eyelashes.

"Come in, come in, dearests. Forgive me. I forgot myself. Welcome. Our riches are yours, the joy is ours," she welcomes us in peasant fashion. "I must be losing my mind, to make you stand outside in the snow. Oh, fool—fool that I am. Do sit down here. Take off your coats. The room is warm. We are making bread. Are you hungry?"

Alona is her old self again. She addresses us both, gives us the best chairs, lights the lamp, stokes the fire in the stove. She does not ask us why we are here, why we are dressed in rags. We sit comfortably by the table and watch her spread a white homespun table-cloth and put plates, glasses and napkins on it. The smell of fresh baking bread runs all through the house with a warm invitation. We look around the room. It is so familiar, but everything is much poorer. The stove is smudged. The walls are aged. A few things are missing or replaced by cheap ones. I look for the big bronze oil lamp which our squadron gave Alona for Christmas. It is nowhere to be seen. Its place is taken by a cheap tin lamp. And the photographs of the cadets are all gone from the walls.

"What is it," I think, "that has changed this room so much?" I find the answer as I look at Alona's small feet in patched and worn shoes, at her dark clothes with shiny seams, and when I realize that the aunt is scrubbing the bread board with her hand to save every stray grain of flour. They are so poor they are counting the pieces of bread and preserving their used tea leaves. The inanimate

objects seem to be the first to lose courage; they reflect poverty more clearly than do human beings.

The door of the brick oven is open and the fire gleams busily. The old aunt crouches in front of it as she always did, noiseless, deaf and dumb, wrapped up in layers of shawls. Gradually I thaw out. Warmth spreads inside of me, and peace around me. I begin to feel young and happy, as though I were being tucked in bed under a warm fluffy blanket.

Through the smoke rings of his cigarette, Alec watches Alona's every move. Dressed in a dark skirt with a long, dark, tight-fitting redingote, she looks slimmer, but her tall figure has not lost its peasant stolidity. When she hands me a glass of warm milk, I can see that her hands have preserved their remarkable shape and flexibility. It gives me pleasure to look at her long thin fingers holding the plate as I drink the thick rich milk. All her hard work has not spoiled the transparent texture of her hands or roughened their smooth skin. So striking is this mixture of the coarse and sensitive in her appearance, that in former days the cadets liked to build up stories of Alona's romantic birth—her father must have been a prince, her mother a gipsy. She laughed at us heartily when we told her that, but she was pleased. She did not think herself beautiful, but liked to look at her hands, especially when playing the guitar. Touching the strings or running along the scale, they were as expressive as her voice.

Alec answers her questions simply. They are tactful. Not a single inquiry about the revolution, Moscow, or the present insurrection. All she asks is, was he wounded? Did he suffer in the war? Can he wait a few minutes more for supper? Is he eating enough? He looks pale. She does not forget me, either. Polite and friendly, she divides her hospitality equally between us. But all her being, the

gleam in her eyes, the tenderness of her voice are concentrated on Alec. Looking on, I want to laugh and cry. The conversation moves along slowly, as though among friends who know each other well, and who hate to spoil the joy of reunion with unnecessary words.

Alec crosses the room to the window and looks through the glass, but immediately turns back and, catching Alona's eye, smiles to her. She answers him whole-heartedly, bending slightly in his direction.

"It's snowing hard, my little lord."

Alec does not answer a word, but goes into the corner and looks silently for a long time at the guitar.

"The old guitar," he says.

"The old guitar." Alona nods her head, smiling again.

Alec carefully touches the strings without taking the instrument off the wall. They sound clear and sad. Alona leaves the skillet in care of her aunt and goes up to him. She also touches a string, on a clear major note. Alona asks:

"May I?"

Alec nods his head.

Alona takes down the guitar, puts the ribbon around her neck, and leaning against the wall, begins to run the chords tenderly. In a barely audible, soft voice she sings the song Alec always liked:

"Pour it in—drink it all;
Loving cup of younger days.
Start a song—the only song,
Song of love in month of May."

The two of them, in a far corner, stand and hum, oblivious to the world. The guitar tinkles, the fire crackles, the old aunt delicately sweeps the ashes from the floor with a

home-made brush, the wind outside throws the hard snow-flakes against the window-panes.

When I wake up in the middle of the night, Alec's bed is empty. The door to the middle room is open, and the glowing light from the stove paints the boards of the floor red. I hear a faint whisper from above, slowly disappearing into nowhere, like the long scar left in the sky by a falling star. "My little lord—oh, my little lord."

The next morning as I wait for the train at the junction, the sun blinds my eyes. The snow is so white that it throws rays like spotlights into the dark blue sky. It seems a bright dead world. Even the switchman in his little house is dozing by the window.

A strange peace is in Alec's voice: "I have thought it over. I talked it over with her. It is the thing for me to do."

I am afraid to interrupt him. I know him well enough to realize that he is speaking almost to himself.

"All those I care about think me dead. Let them think it; it's better. If I were to tell them what I'm going to do, they'd say I was crazy. Please, Father, don't tell anybody. Don't betray me. I'll stay here. I'll start a new life in my own way. I must get a new birth in a world that is built entirely by my own hands. But first I must lose myself. My old self must die for me as it died for the others."

We walked up and down. The snow squeaked under our soles. Silence for a long time, then suddenly he stopped and turned to me.

"Look here. I am twenty-five years old. I went through the University. I studied music. I fought in the war. I loved Russia. I still do. But what do I know about it? Nothing but what other people have told me. All useless.

I want to find out for myself. And I want to find out in sweat, in toil, in struggle. That is a small price to pay for one's own life, isn't it?" He gave me no chance to answer. "Always I've received life from the hands of others. That's not right. I'm through with it. I've got to find out now what I'm worth to myself. I've got to, don't you see? Do you understand that as I am to-day I am no good to anybody? What's the use of a fellow who can't help any one else? Who can't even help himself? The only thing I know how to do is to fight.

"I don't know how I'll manage my life with Alona, but I will. I have nothing. She is poor now too. She told me so. She hasn't boarded any cadets since we left. She tills her land herself and spins linen. But she said, 'Stay with me. One of your lives is gone, but every human being has many lives. As many as you can make. Every new life starts with the discard of the old one. Somebody discarded yours cruelly for you. You are ready, my little lord,' she said, 'for a new life of your own. Your soul is robbed and naked, ready to put on a robe of new life. I'll spin it for you. I'll stand by you, and all that's mine is yours. When you left, I thought myself dead. I looked for you in every bird song, in every field flower, in every star at night. That search, that sorrow was a new life for me. I was robbed and naked when you left. I spun a robe of memories over me. And it kept me warm for four years. Now you have come. Again I stand robbed and naked. You have robbed me of my memories, but you have brought yourself, yet not yourself, because you have changed, because you haven't got a thing in you that you had before.

"'Rest in my heart,' she said." Alec repeated it pensively. "'Rest in my heart.' But it isn't that I want to rest. In her kindness she thinks so. She's got it wrong. It isn't rest I want, it's life. I want an honest struggle.

Not for money or medals or fame, but for the sake of life itself. Just the way a tree struggles to get its sap out of the earth. The way the earth struggles to pull clouds down from the sky. And the way the river bores its own path through the rock."

There is nothing poetic in his voice. He is as matter-of-fact as though talking of bread and butter, and in truth, that is what he is talking about. But his voice is young and he talks like one who has no doubt, who has found his way, but who tries to explain something to a child.

I make another effort. "You'll get sick of it. You'll quit it in a month."

He went on as though I hadn't spoken. "I want to enjoy the fire when it's cold, and know that I've chopped down the dead log with my own hands. I want to turn over slabs of soil, place the seed in it, wait for the crop, and eat the bread which I've made for myself. I want to get up at sunrise and find my God rising with the sweat of the land, and descending with the dew from the air. I want to have time to create peace in my soul first, and then all around me, as far as my eyes can see; not by murder and violence, but by clean self-denial. I want to invent my own prayers. I want to be free to share my bread with every beggar, and not think about it, as the brook shares its water, and the bee its honey, and the apple tree its fruit.

"You must understand me, Father. You have spoken about Poland to me that way many times. I don't have Poland, and my Russia is gone. But is it? It all depends on where I start to look for it. I'll start right here, where for a while nobody will be able to find me and drag me into any controversies or half-baked achievements. I've got to find it for myself. I've got to."

I gave up. But I had really given up from his first word; there was nothing I could say.

“Don’t you want anything, Alec? Don’t you want me to send you things—just to begin with? I’m working. I’m making money.”

“No, thanks, Father. Nothing. Money is the first thing I don’t want. I am robbed and naked, and I’ll spin my own robe. Don’t tell anybody where I am or what I’m doing. And if by any chance you meet my people, tell them I died at my post. That’s what they brought me up to do.”

The train whistled around the curve.

“Good-by, Father.”

“Don’t you want me to come and see you, Alec?”

“Come and see me in a year. Not before. I may have a hard time, and you’ll tempt me. Good-by, good-by.” He shook my hands, smiling broadly. “Don’t be sad, you fool,” he said. “It’s my birthday!”

From the box-car of the freight train, I saw the slim dark figure walking with wide strides along the snowy road for a long time. A couple of times it turned around and pointed with its arm to the sky and to the earth.

CHAPTER XXVII

LAST STAND

AFTER the abdication of the Emperor, I am told, the whole population of Moscow came out into the streets as if it were Easter Sunday, and remained there till late at night. People sang and laughed, strolling along, or walked swiftly from house to house visiting friends. Strangers greeted one another and exchanged congratulations. Men and women who had never met before formed long rows that stretched from one wall to another across the streets and, holding one another's hands, marched around the town. There was no disorder and no violence. Every one was much too busy cheering to occupy his mind with anything else.

When the Whites capitulated, I saw a very different picture. Moscow poured out from its houses and filled up its streets and squares with a thick silent tar of humanity. People stood bewildered, blinking their eyes, moving from foot to foot without leaving the spot. A run-away horse caught and held short by the bit stands like that. An avalanche of black rock after an earthquake, no longer rolling, but lying in dismay among crushed houses and orchards has the same kind of heaviness. The people could not believe that the thirteen days of shooting were over. They shrank from the smoldering ruins, the jagged holes in walls, the frozen puddles of blood as if expecting that at any minute these might come to life again and begin to spit death. The fighters themselves did not believe that they had reached the end.

At the corner of Peter Street and Peter Boulevard three cadets were stranded on the roof of an unfinished five-story house. They made a machine-gun nest by a chimney in the middle, built of new red brick. A roof structure protected their backs and heads. All the houses around were much lower. The length of Peter Boulevard lay under their fire, and from daylight till noon they kept it empty. No one ventured so much as to stick his nose out of the cross-streets and alleys. The cadets must have seen the change in the picture from above, but they did not realize what it meant. They must have noticed that the shooting had stopped, but they probably did not believe their ears. Maybe they even saw the Red calico flag hastily made and hoisted on to the flag-pole of the Alexander Infantry School. They did not leave the roof nor cease their vigilant watching.

Soon everybody around began to try to convey to them the idea that their resistance was useless; that the Whites had lost. White table-cloths were waved at them on broomsticks out of the windows. Men shouted, leaning cautiously from behind the gates. A dog was chased across the boulevard toward them with a red strip tied to its collar. Several Reds from adjoining roofs tried to signal to the cadets in Morse Code to come down. The cadets' answer was bullets. Now angry, the Reds began to fire their rifles, and a new battle was started all over again. Three against the whole town. The cadets were well protected; a barricade of loose bricks hid them safely, and they had plenty of ammunition. Until they were starved or out of ammunition, they could not be moved.

After a while the Reds penetrated to the first floor of the house. They could not go any farther because the cadets threw down all the ladders, and through small openings in the rafters, shot any head that appeared in the stair-

way shaft. The cadets were clearly in a frenzy of fight or fear; they knew that capitulation would mean death, and in that state, were unable to grasp what was going on below. The more activity they saw, the more sure they were that they must go on with the fight. Their resistance angered the Reds. In detachments they massed all around in the back yards, roofs and crossings—wherever they could find a protection from that far-reaching, fierce machine-gun. At last the Communists succeeded in placing another machine-gun in one of the windows of a house a block away and began to chip the bricks all around the cadets. They answered bullet for bullet and splash for splash, until they silenced the Red machine.

Half an hour of inactivity and then a field piece was pulled out by a rope from behind the corner of the boulevard and, still maneuvered by the rope, turned to face the cadets. Two Reds managed to dart toward it and found protection behind the gun's steel shields. They could now operate the gun. A yell of "Hurray" rose high up in the air, answered by the riveting noises of cadets' fire scratching at the steel shields. Two more Reds carrying four shells, ran toward the gun. One was caught by a bullet, but the shells he held in both hands were within reach of the gunners. "Hurray!" Wham! Clang! Fire! The field piece jerked back convulsively and breathed a small cloud of smoke. The shell went over the cadets' heads. The Reds burst into the *International*.

The gunners reloaded and aimed carefully. The cadets kept on their drilling fusillade, but the steel shields could not be pierced. Wham! Clang! A second explosion. The three window openings on the fourth floor right under the cadets became one large hole. A cloud of dust rose from this hole and, long after the reverberation of the shot had ceased, bricks kept tumbling down. The noise of the shout-

ing Reds was even louder than the explosion; as if they knew that the last effort was approaching, the last shot which would start a new era. They cheered and encouraged the gunners with yells, hurrahs and the *International*, sung fast, and almost without a semblance of tune.

The invisible cadets suddenly realized that their time was coming to an end. Recklessly they rose above their protective embankment, three tiny specks. One was emptying his rifle as fast as he could. The other two were flooding the width and length of the boulevard with lead, without aim or concentration, hurrying to spend all energy, all reserve strength and ammunition in the few minutes that remained to them. The machine-gun spurted lead crazily. Occasionally a window-pane whined as if whipped, and a naked tree along the boulevard dropped a branch or shivered helplessly. Each time the gunners showed an elbow or the top of a fur cap from behind the shield, the cadet machine-gun threw its aimless fury on the steel with a ringing snarl.

Suddenly the gun on the roof stopped, as if cut off by a knife. All three cadets rose above their embankment into full view, though still protected up to their knees. One continued to shoot his rifle at the cannon, the second held the third one who swayed and hung on to his comrade. He must have been wounded. Then the rifle in the hands of the first cadet also fell silent, and he swung it far away from him. It rolled down the zinc roof with a belated tin clatter and fell on the pavement.

The three cadets held one another's hands. They had nothing to shoot with. They had nothing left to throw into the enemy's faces but their voices. If they did that, nobody heard them. The voices were lost between a roar from below and a blue silence from above. The last defenders of White Moscow faced the last shot. It rang out with the same mechanical indifference as the pre-

vious two. It did not sound any louder or lower; neither angry nor annoyed. It merely clanged for the third and last time and recoiled heavily with the same smoky breath. The shell hit the brick structure around the chimney. Cadets, loose bricks, part of the wall and pieces of wood and zinc sheets flew up in the air like black fireworks,—some higher, some lower. For a long time they continued to fall and rattle on adjoining roofs. The empty boulevard and streets filled with people. The gunners led out four horses and hitched them to the field piece in a businesslike manner. They swung around and clattered away. The last shot was fired. The curious were already climbing the unfinished house, putting the discarded ladders back into the stair shaft.

Next to me stood a cadet, all his insignia removed and an infantry sack on his shoulders. He had a civilian's hat, and looked haggard, with a week-old growth of young beard around his face. He leaned on the wall and continued to look with empty eyes at the place on the roof where, ten minutes ago, his three comrades had made their last stand.

"When did you capitulate?" I asked him.

He did not hear me. I moved closer to him and asked again. He slowly shifted his eyes and continued to look at me with the same unseeing gaze.

"I'm all right," I whispered. "I'm White. When did you capitulate?"

The cadet shook his head slowly. His parched lips moved and, like an automaton, he spoke evenly.

"We did not—we did not capitulate. We did not surrender. Riabtzov—his mother—went to the Reds and surrendered for all the Whites—before we knew it the damned Red calico had crawled up along the flag-pole in the Cadet school. Next thing, he himself was arrested and held as a hostage. The White Committee of Defense was

captured in the midst of the conference. We cried—we cried——” He finished his whisper, his eyes still dry and unseeing. Riabtsov was a prominent White infantry colonel at General Headquarters.

“What’ll you do now?” I asked.

“I don’t know. They have all our names and addresses. They let us out of the school one by one. They disarmed us and tore off our epaulets, our buttons, cockades, buckles. They packed the grounds of the school—the Reds; the Square of Arbat too. We had to go one by one through the whole mass. They laughed when I was going through. They tripped me and spit in my face.”

He stroked his cheeks with a dirty hand, as if still trying to wipe off the saliva.

“Don’t stay in Moscow,” I said. “The Reds will look for all of you.”

“I know—I won’t—I . . .” He stopped suddenly and his eyes became alive. He looked at me sharply. “White?” he questioned me in a hiss.

“White,” I assured him again.

“We’ll all go south. South. Charkow, Kiev, Odessa. This fight isn’t over yet. We all agreed on that. We all go south. South.”

He took his eyes away and again started to look at the jagged roof of the unfinished house.

“South . . .” he repeated once more through clenched teeth, trying to fortify himself. “South . . .” He made a movement as if to salute the ruins of the roof, but checked himself and held his hand half-way to his temple. Instead, he made a quick sign of the cross.

“South,” he said for the last time, hung his head and moved away. The milling crowd blotted him out.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A NEW COMMISSIONER

"WHERE have you been?" Valka asked me sharply when I came back to the Studio.

"Does it make any difference now?" I retorted.

"Where have you been?" he said again, almost yelling at me. I looked at him. He seemed taller and straighter. His small, prematurely old face was determined and set in a challenging grin. He held his hands in his pockets, but I could see that his fists were clenched. He stared at me from under his eyebrows.

"Don't be a fool," I said. "And don't yell at me like a hysterical policeman——"

"You cheated me—you cheated me. We agreed to stay in the Studio. You disappeared somewhere. You had no right——"

"Oh, shut up!"

"I won't. You're like all Whites—a liar and cheat. You sneaked out."

"Well, be like all the Reds—go and squeal on me. Go on, if you want to. I'll tell you where I was. I went to Tver and tried to bring the cadets here—that's all. Go on and squeal."

"Did you bring any?" he asked threateningly, shaking with excitement.

"I didn't. Your lot killed enough of them."

"And you wanted more of them to be killed. Is that it? What right did you have?"

"My own right. Don't annoy me now, Valka, because I don't know what I might do——"

had the warmest relations. For a while Valka and I looked into each other's eyes. At last I said:

"Well, I presume you know what you'll do next, and I'll be right here in the Studio until I find myself somewhere else, Valka."

He took his hands out of his pockets, crossed his fingers and began to crack them.

"If you only knew how hard you make it for me——"

"Nonsense, Valka, it can not be changed. If only you and your lot could put yourselves in another fellow's place once in a while."

"That's all that we are doing."

"Yes, but you choose the fellow you want to understand, not the one who happens to face you."

Valka put his hand on my shoulder. "It happens that you face me. And I want you to know something. If you weren't a necessary part of the Studio, if you weren't primarily a specialist of your craft, a person we need at present more than ever, I would talk to you differently."

"That's it—that's it, Valka. Just what I was trying to say. That's exactly why I hate your outfit. I don't hate you personally, but I do hate your way of thinking. You need me and therefore you make me work for you. You take from my hands whatever you need, but you watch me all the time, and spy on me. The other side held the upper hand because every one had to sell himself for the price of bread and butter. Your side will boss, command and get everybody for the price of fear—fear of losing his life, the only life."

"Don't you worry, not for long. . . . Our people will learn quickly."

"I don't care, Valka. It's the principle. You believe that results justify the means. I don't. I'll stay here and work without thinking for whom I work, only because I worked

here before you became a commissioner; for the sake of the work itself. Maybe I did make a mistake in not telling you where and what I was going for two days ago, but I never did anything right here in the Studio that wasn't meant to bring people—all kinds of people—a bit of happiness every night. I'll keep on doing the way I did before. You may watch me all you want. Let's not talk about it any more."

I turned around and went up-stairs. In the greenroom rehearsal was in full swing. I sat in one corner and looked on silently. Valka came in after me. Hope Bromley was rehearsing a play she had written. Boris sat next to her. It was a symbolic drama depicting the conflict between love and civic duty. Lyda had the part of an old peasant woman. She was rehearsing a scene with Vera, who was a queen in disguise, interviewing her subjects. The scene required a sharp but gradual growth of tension. The queen thinks herself kind and just, but discovers that the people do not consider her so. She is confronted with the old woman's complaints and evidence of the people's sufferings. The queen tries to justify and defend herself and finally, in a rage of argument, betrays herself. The old woman recognizes her.

The scene did not jell. Vera and Lyda tried it over several times. The change from the queen in disguise to the queen in person was not effective. Hope began to re-analyze the scene. She changed a few lines; struck out a few. Boris looked over the pages of the manuscript and scratched his head.

"Something's wrong, Hope," he said finally.

Valka stepped out to the center of the room and began to speak to Boris, stuttering with excitement. "I know what's wrong. I know, Boris. Let me tell you. There is too much talk, too much explanation. The scene is too

placid. It is a conversation between the characters. It is not a declaration of two forces. . . ."

"But they are not forces. They are two human beings," Hope interrupted him.

"Wait—wait, Hope—no more human beings on the stage."

"What?" came in a long drawl from Lyda.

"Exactly what I said—no more human beings. Do you think you can top the performances of human beings during these last thirteen days? Do you think you can interest them with a logical development of dialogue or any kind of thoughts growing out of individual reasoning—out of their own personal attitudes? No more, Hope. You've got to make a general statement. Then another statement on the opposite side. You've got to make it clear to the audience which side the performers want them to choose. The playwright and the actors must steer the audience toward the goal. You've got to use argument piled upon argument without any concern for personal or individual feelings. But with the gravest concern toward the proof that the goal you choose is the right and only one. The words must scream like a row of twenty-four sheet posters, each one telling the world that the goods it represents are the best—are the only ones in the world. . . ."

"How can you act that kind of stuff?" asked Lyda. "Maybe I'm stupid, but I couldn't do that."

"You'll have to. You'll have to from now on. I know it for sure. You see, in a capitalistic world the theater is the medium for stimulating the digestion of a dinner. In our world it must be digested food for the brain. The proletariat is nothing but a child yet; while it is growing it must get its brain food in a clear and easily understood form, that of the theater. And that food must give the brain the nourishment it needs most. That nourishment comes from

class consciousness, class problems, class beliefs and class aims. Do you understand me? Elementary formulas for the half of the world that was, until to-day, refused the right to think . . .”

We all looked at him with astonishment. Valka had started loudly the new era in our craft. I knew what he was talking about. I had guessed it long ago. We had all guessed it when we broke away from the Moscow Art Theater. If the actors hesitated to follow him unquestioningly, it was only because his words sounded a bit like a command.

I got up. “Valka is right, Hope. You’ll have to do it, Lyda. As a matter of fact, you did it intuitively through all the years the Studio was on its own. Forget the human drama. Bring on the drama of formulas or the drama of general problems, or splatter around the burlesque and the grotesque, the clownade, the mockery. Don’t touch human feelings; they are sore right now. They are burning. Every heart is bursting with them. If you appear on the stage and talk about how you feel, whom you love, what you see in others, you’ll sound silly. In comparison to life, you’ll be a canary in the midst of a brass band.”

Valka jumped to me and shook my sleeve. “That’s what I meant exactly—exactly. I knew you’d understand. Oh, how great it will be to work from now on. . . . Listen to him—listen,” he shouted. “He’s right.”

I continued, “Let me finish, Valka. . . . I’m glad there is something we agree on. . . . You see, Hope, from now on, intimacy or nuances have no place before the kind of audience you’ll see here to-morrow. Yesterday their cue was a rifle shot or the corpse of a brother, or a wall pecked with the bullets of a firing squad. Now do you want them to care what Mary, Ann or Lisa feel or suffer or love? They want to know what throws masses against masses,

what brings a spark into a mob. They want to justify their own actions of yesterday and to-morrow in a mass. They want to understand their own force in thousands. They want a perspective on themselves. They want to hear the formulated cry of thousands of their own hearts."

"And what else?" a husky voice asked from the door.

We all turned around. On the threshold stood Gregor, white and erect, with a battered and scratched face. His shirt was torn. His coat hung on him with a ripped-off collar and lapel. He took a few steps toward us.

"God! what's happened to you?" exclaimed Lyda.

"Never mind." He smiled crookedly with swollen lips. At least two of his shining white teeth were missing. He wiped the blood from his eyebrow. "You want to know how the masses feel. I'd like to tell you how I feel—how I feel right now."

"Greg—please, please——" Valka was busy over him as a mother bird. "Whatever's happened to you? Tell me. I'll do something. Nobody had a right to beat you up."

"Nobody did, Valka." Gregor swayed as if drunk. Some one brought him a glass of water. He drank it greedily. We all surrounded him and led him to a chair. Lyda ran out and came back with iodine and cotton. Valka held Gregor's hands and kept asking him what had happened. Gregor shook his head as if trying to get rid of something in his ears, and continued to smile inanely.

"What were you arguing about?" he asked stubbornly.

"Oh, drop it, Gregor. What happened to you?"

"To me? Nothing, I tell you. Nothing." He paused a while and then said with the same crooked smile, "I killed my brother—I hope I did."

Nobody said a word. All eyes looked into his and waited. We thought he had lost his mind. Gregor began to cry,

covering his mouth with his palm and smearing the tears all over his face. He could not say a word more. Sobs choked him and he began to shake with hysteria. He looked like a man in an attack of epilepsy. We had to hold him.

"What did he say?" Volodia asked me. "He must have gone mad."

"Valka, do you know where Gregor's been to-day?"

"I think he went home this morning. The moment I told him that the Whites had capitulated, he grabbed his coat and went away. He was so worried about Faina."

Gregor heard us mentioning his wife's name and, digging his nails into the arm-rests of the chair, straightened out his legs, trying to conquer his convulsions. His face looked terrible; white skin, dark hair, black and blue spots, scratches and blotches of iodine. His eyes were rolling, and tears flowed continuously. He gritted his teeth.

"Has anything happened to Faina? Tell us, Greg, please." Vera held him by the shoulders, trying to get an answer.

Gregor pushed her away and made an effort to get up. We did not let him. Lyda, herself ready to burst out crying, held his head and stroked his hair.

"Please, Greg. Please tell us what happened to Faina? Please—maybe we can do something. Is she home?"

Gregor sighed deeply, with short swallows of air, and said, half moaning and breaking words in half: "Faina . . . and my brother . . . I found them asleep . . . in bed . . . together." Suddenly he burst into a wail. "I hope I killed him. I hope he is dead . . . dead. . ."

Lyda poured a sedative into his mouth, and Gregor, his teeth chattering on the glass, drank it unwillingly.

In the next five minutes Valka and I found ourselves running toward Gregor's house. We knew where he lived, in a small separate house in a back yard. We ran up four

steps and rang the bell. Nobody answered. We tried the door. It opened of itself. The first room was a large living-room. The shades were drawn and it was dark. To the left was a bedroom, and to the right, the dining-room and kitchen. We knew that Gregor's brother, Anton, lived in the maid's room beyond the kitchen. I called out loud, "Faina!" A woman's scream answered. The door to the bedroom banged and the lock clicked. I approached close to it.

"Faina, it's Valka and I. . . . Where is Anton?"

"Go away! Go away! Please!" A pleading voice sounded by the door.

"We will go away. Only tell us if Anton is all right. Gregor thinks he killed him."

Anton's voice exploded hysterically. "Get out of here! And tell Gregor that if he so much as shows up here, I'll murder him. I'll really kill him. Get out now—get out!"

We walked out of the room and into the yard. For a while we stood by the gate.

"Let's go back," I said.

"Let's." Valka nodded.

After a few blocks, it was he who spoke first.

"Greg was worried about Faina all the time. He loved her so much. What'll happen to him now? His own brother, too. His own brother. . . ."

We were passing the University morgue. The line of those who had come to search for relatives among the killed stood twice around the block. Undertakers, dressed in black, moved softly and talked in hushed sweet voices, distributing their cards among the waiting men and women.

By the gate of the Studio yard we met Paul with two pails wrapped up in a newspaper. He winked at us with a humorous grin and clowned a rough way of talking.

“How’re you bumming along, comrades?”

“What have you got there, Paul?” Valka pointed seriously to the two pails.

Paul continued the mockery. “Red paint, Commissioner, red paint. I bought up all the red paint left in town. From now on, I’m going to paint all my sets red. . . . Trend of the times, trend of the times, comrades. By the way, Commissioner,” he turned to Valka, “do you realize that red paint is already twice as expensive as it was two weeks ago? And I was told that in a week it will be four times as much. Say, what is that darned phrase? ‘The demand exceeds the supply,’ isn’t it, Valka? Well, a wise guy like myself runs ahead of any words. I’m provided and safe for the next six months.”

“You’ll have to be provided with red paint for the rest of your life, Paul. Better get used to the idea,” exclaimed Valka joyfully.

“We get used only to what we want to, Teacher, and no more,” answered Paul, squinting one eye.

We helped him to carry the pails up-stairs.

EPILOGUE

THERE are five of them in front of me—five long letters from Alec. Four are written on cheap paper torn out of an old note-book. One is on plain, light brown wrapping paper, cut by a knife into pages. Words fill the sheets clear to the edge with small, square energetic script. I cherish these letters. Every few months I read them over. Between the lines, I see Alec as if alive, with all his virtues and faults, as I knew him in those short but pregnant years. Yet in all this writing there seems to be something not quite like the old Alec; something elusive that makes me go back and try to recall every word, every tone of his voice, every wrinkle of his forehead.

“... I told you not to come and see me before one year had gone by. I was afraid you'd tempt me. That was silly of me. Two months after you left, Father, all the riches and power in the world could not have taken me away from my present life. Because it is *my* life—from beginning to end. We were brought up to enjoy a ready-made, established, smoothly running existence. We were taught to die for that existence. But we were never taught to create life for ourselves or to hold it after we had created it. That is the whole secret. To create, and then to hold. . . .”

“... I am not sure that you can realize how poor we are this winter. We have no money at all. I do not want to make any. The house is very much run down and I am working from daylight till sundown trying to put it in shape.

Alona has a few sacks of grain, potatoes and wild apples, a bucket of honey, half a keg of lard, and about a hundred heads of cabbage. On these the three of us will have to live all winter.

"Once I went and helped the railroad crew to clear the tracks after a blizzard. It was an emergency case and every man from every village was called to work. They wanted to pay me money. I did not take it. I said I was happy to help the common cause. The Communist foreman came to our house a few days later and praised me and wanted me to join the Communistic Party. He said that they needed men who would set an example of self-sacrifice. I declined, and told him that there had been no sacrifice, that for my part, I had done nothing but justify my existence to myself.

"Next time he came he brought along five pounds of salt and two bricks of tea. He asked me to accept them; 'For the sake of the justification of my existence,' he said, and laughed. I accepted. And I enjoy that salt heartily. I never realized that salt could be so precious."

". . . You should see Alona's house now. I have repaired it and fixed it up all around. Instead of nails I had to use wooden pegs that I made in the evenings, and Alona collected pine tar and moss to patch the cracks and joints. It was a slow hard job, but it is done, and the house is much warmer. In the summer I am planning to patch the roof."

". . . Strange to say, with all the work I am doing, I have so much time to think. It gets dark early. Around five o'clock the day is over. I often take a long walk in the familiar fields. They all look new to me, as if I were seeing them for the first time. In my former days, so many things escaped me. Life was so crowded with innumerable

established functions that no room was left for life itself. But now I have only one thing to do,—that is to make myself the human being I want to be. I discover the richness everywhere around me; richness which seems to extend its good will toward me.

"I have learned, for instance, to breathe for the first time in my life. I never knew before that there could be such joy in breathing the sharp air of a winter's night. Formerly, like all of us, I just snapped the air hurriedly, without thinking. I did not know how it tasted or what power it held. I do know that to-day. Sometimes I walk alone through the deep snow. I put my hand on the bark of the trees and I listen to the water gurgling under the ice of a frozen brook. I look into the upturned precipice of dark sky and fill my lungs with its incense, and my eyes with the sparkle of stars. Every swallow of air is registered on my mind and penetrates my whole body, from my brain down to my feet. You'll think me crazy, writing you about breathing, but I've just come in from that kind of walk, and I am happy because the whole universe walked beside me, as if it were an older brother who marched with me, holding my hand in his."

"... Alona speaks of you often. America, for her, is another planet. She thinks it is Paradise, and that I should have gone there with you. I tell her that every one carries his paradise with him, and that the greatest paradise is one which nobody can take away or one which nobody else wants."

"... Thanks, many, many thanks for your letter. We have read it over and over. Thank you for asking if I need anything, and for your good intentions in offering to send me things. Father, dear, I don't need a thing. It

sounds strange, but I don't need a thing. What I lack, you couldn't send me. No, forgive me. You have already sent it in your letter, in the warm feeling expressed in it, and your interest in my doings. The rest is comfort for my mortal body, and all that is comparative.

"I have all the comfort I want. Our house is warm; our food is enough to sustain us—isn't that what every learned doctor prescribes for ailing patients?—our work is the most stimulating and interesting I have ever done. I don't know if I wrote you about it.

"In the spring I had finished the things which had to be done around the house and on our small parcel of land, so that we could live in it winter in and winter out. I found out that no more than two hours of daily work were necessary to carry all three of us along. That took care of our food, clothing and warmth. We had the days for ourselves. I decided that I had enough to share with others.

"So I went to the Committee for the Poor in Y. village, and told them that I would like to work with the children, or rather for them, as a regular routine of every-day association. Not a school, as they were already attending one, but a sort of open air children's forum, where they could learn to understand the creative side of life through practical demonstration. The Committee knew me. Everybody for ten miles around came one day or another to size up Alona's husband. To them, I was a refugee from Bessarabia, and as soon as they saw that I had no earmarks of the 'former ruling classes,' they accepted me without suspicion. So they agreed to my experiment.

"I said that I'd try it for only one summer and then they could examine the children and judge for themselves whether they had profited by associating with me, and if they had learned anything. All summer long, children for miles around gathered every afternoon on the railroad embank-

ment. Maybe you'll be interested to know what I did. I helped them to discover things. I provoked them into asking me questions.

"I did not teach them anything or give them any fixed program; they get enough of that in school. But I made them want to create their own lives, to stimulate their interest to an activity which will persevere, to make them independent of all formulas and recipes and make them indispensable to their fellows. First of all, I tried to show them that the idea of ownership is only good as long as it embraces things necessary to sustain one's life,—after that it is not necessary. It befuddles and mixes up one's existence.

"I made them collect and bring any junk or discarded things to me that they happened to get interested in. They brought me everything, beginning with a dead bird, and ending with an iron bolt lost from a passing train. We buried the bird. I told them about nature's thriftiness and conservation of all discarded matter, turning it into a source of life. On the grave of the bird we planted a sunflower. It grew huge and heavy, and birds came in flocks and ate its seeds. That talk was easy. The bolt was much more difficult. I had to go to the library at night and brush up on iron ore mining, on steel mill production, on iron working machinery, on railroad construction and so forth. I'm sure the boy who found the bolt will become a great railroad builder!

"I had another case. A little eight-year-old girl came with her hands empty. When I asked her what she had brought with her, she said, 'A song.' We listened to it. The song consisted of an indescribable tune and a string of single words like this: 'Sun. Cloud. Water. Dandelion. Earth. Sky-lark. Song. Cloud. Sun.' At last I was in my own sphere. We talked about music. We sang. We made a

tuning-fork from an old file. To make a long story short, in three months the children sang Bach and Bortniansky in chorus. They all found out what they were most interested in, and they all learned as fast as they could about their favorite subject for a single reason,—to be able to share it with the others.

“In the fall the Committee for the Poor, after an examination of the youngsters, gave me the use of their club premises, and I am established as head of the children’s branch of their club.”

“. . . Would you believe that I have never been to the Cavalry School and have never seen any one from there? It continues as the Tver Red Cavalry School, not much changed as far as I can see from a distance of five miles. The cadets maneuver just the way we did. They put the same roads and fields on their maps we did,—and funniest of all, they sing the same songs we used to sing; only the words are changed. Do you remember:

“ ‘Fellows so brave
Are the Imperial Guards
They sing and love
But mostly fight.’

Well, to-day a squadron was riding across the fields. The wind brought me the words of their song:

“ ‘Fellows so brave
Are the Workers’ Guards
They sing and love
But mostly fight.’

Doesn’t that remind you of the story of Catherine the Great, when a Minister of War suggested that she exchange the

quarters of two cavalry regiments; moving one from Petersburg to Odessa, and the other from Odessa to Petersburg, three thousand miles apart? 'What is the difference between the two regiments?' asked Catherine. 'Why, Your Majesty, the dragoons wear blue trousers, and the hussars wear red ones.' 'Why don't you transfer the trousers? It would be so much cheaper.'

"Why couldn't they have changed the words in the songs without all that we saw in 1918?"

". . . One cadet came to me while I was chopping wood in the forest. 'Tell me, comrade, have you ever heard about a certain "Alona's house" near the Cavalry School? Do you know where it was? They say that in the old days it was the smart thing to spend week-end leaves there.'

"The old days are gone, my friend,' I answered him. 'I can not tell you where "Alona's house" was. Who told you about it?'

"Oh, we were just talking about it among ourselves. Heard it somewhere. The Cooperative Hotel is so darned dreary.'

"Is the Cooperative Hotel what used to be the Merchants' Hotel?'

"So I understand.'

"I wonder if they made a new sign or just painted the new words over the old ones? What do you think, Father?"

". . . I believe that words do not change anything. I believe that words are the most futile things in the world. Unless human beings learn to communicate with other human beings through their actions, the world will always be bewildered and in a turmoil. If, instead of staying with Alona, I had gone back to Moscow and tried to do the best I could for new Russia, I would not have had a chance. I would

have been lost in 'definitions,' 'orientations,' 'adjustments,' 'resolutions,' and 'revaluations,'—all the hangovers my generation has got to go through. And my generation, like all generations immediately after wars and revolutions, is self-destroyed, self-exhausted. They remind me of the flowers of those plants which blossom only once and cause the death of the plant. We all should have died. Only then could we have continued to live.

"I am lucky to have died. I was resurrected immediately and now I continue to live as fully as I ever want to. Whatever happens in new Russia while my generation is still alive is not important. Their work is the work of men who unpack a library and put the books on the shelves. The new growing generation is the one which will read the books, learn, and harvest the results of their learning. I have infinite faith in that generation. The only thing which sometimes makes me feel uncomfortable is the hatred which is cultivated on a State scale—the hatred of capitalism. You can not fight with hate as a weapon. You have to fight with enthusiasm and creation. The strong tree crowds out the weak one because it has more enthusiasm for reaching the sky and it creates its own strength from the sap of the earth. It does not hate its indifferent brother. Hate is wasted energy in the 'motor of the universe.'

"Capitalism fights the rest of the world because it loves money and creates it. You've got to put something against it which will be just as much loved, and consequently created by the other side. When I renounced money for myself, it was hard at first. For the first time in my life I had nothing. But I decided to keep my spirit—not my body—alive. That was my creation. So little was needed for that. In a few months I had entirely taken care of my body and I began to have something to share. And then my life became full, rich and careless, as if I were living in Paradise. The power of money lies in 'taking.' That other power—my power—lies

in 'giving,' and I never find myself exhausted. I always have more to give than I gave the last time."

"... Why do all the children in new Russia have wide open eyes as if they were drinking in the daylight?"

". . . My two boys send you their greetings. Kira is twelve, and Oleg ten. The older one studies electricity. He has already delivered one lecture in the village club to a crowd of people five times his age, on the principles of electricity. Every second day Oleg walks five miles back and forth to a Music Center in town. His fingers are not large enough to play Alona's guitar, but they sing together beautifully."

"... The buds are bursting so fast that you can see them. Overnight the rhubarb stuck its red head through the ground. This morning water was dripping from every branch. The brook was swollen. I found snow only in the deepest hollows and ditches. To-day I turned over the half-acre which goes into vegetables, sharpened all the tools, cleaned the beehives, repaired the door to the cellar.

"I gave the forty kids in the club their lesson, and, with Kira, planned a dam across the brook. He wants to use it for power and is now making drawings at the table next to me. After I had given a German lesson to Oleg, I took a walk to the Junction with Alona, and on our return we all had dinner together.

"Now we are resting. Alona is teaching Oleg the song *It Is Not Sundown*. Do you remember it? I'm writing. Outside, the drops of water tattoo merrily in the puddles, and opposite me a bright warm fire cracks and hisses as if saying, 'Watch me dancing. Watch me dancing. See it? See it? See it?'"

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